

The plan to
fill the world
with babies

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America's
"First Grandma"

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Tears of joy as
Swift-mania
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THE WEEK

15 JUNE 2024 | ISSUE 1492

THE BEST OF THE BRITISH AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA

All washed up? Sunak's faltering campaign

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What happened

The Tory manifesto

Rishi Sunak sought to get the Tory election campaign back on track this week as he unveiled his party's tax-cutting manifesto. The centrepiece of the 76-page document is a plan to abolish the basic rate of national insurance for the self-employed, and to cut it by a further 2p for other workers. Other policies include a rise in defence spending, an annual cap on work and family visas, and an extension of child benefit. The manifesto also contains new measures designed to boost home ownership, including a plan to scrap capital gains tax for landlords who sell their properties to tenants. Altogether, the manifesto would deliver around £17bn-worth of tax cuts, which it argues could be funded by reducing welfare spending and cracking down on tax avoidance and evasion.

Launching the manifesto at Silverstone, the racing circuit in Northamptonshire, the Prime Minister said he was not "blind to the fact that people are frustrated with our party and frustrated with me", admitting "we have not got everything right". By then he had repeatedly apologised for leaving last week's D-Day commemorations early (*see page 4*).



The Sunaks at Silverstone

What the editorials said

We're into the meat of the election campaign now, said the Daily Mail. Sunak's manifesto includes some "admirable" tax-cutting proposals that put "clear blue water" between the Tories and Labour, along with sensible moves to curb immigration and build more homes, but it may not be enough to revive the Tories' electoral prospects. The main problem is that "many of the things they are now promising could – and should – have been enacted during their 14 years in power".

The endless repetition of the word "plan" can't disguise the lack of fresh ideas in the manifesto, said The Guardian. Given that the Tories have already cut national insurance twice without enjoying any polling dividend, they're unlikely to win votes by promising to cut it again. Help for pensioners, the return of national service, more defence spending – this is not "a dignified attempt at winning back credibility; just a desperate plea for leniency from a country that is minded to punish the Tories". The Conservatives are appealing to their core vote as part of a damage-limitation strategy, said The Independent. Labour, meanwhile, is running a "safety-first campaign" to guard its lead. It makes for a dull campaign and explains why some experts are predicting "the lowest turnout in modern history".

What happened

Macron's gamble

President Macron stunned France on Sunday by calling snap parliamentary elections after his centrist Renaissance party was trounced by the far-right National Rally (RN) in the European election. In a televised address, he said that he had taken the "grave" decision because he couldn't "carry on as if nothing had happened" after the RN, led by Marine Le Pen, won about 31% of the vote in France, the most of any party. The elections will take place in two rounds, on 30 June and 7 July – weeks before the Paris Olympics.

The far-right also fared well in Germany, where the anti-immigrant AfD won more votes than each of the three parties in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's centre-left coalition, and was beaten only by the centre-right CDU. As expected, Giorgia Meloni's nationalist Brothers of Italy performed strongly; but centre-right parties retained their majority in the 720-seat EU parliament, having won in Spain, Greece and Poland.



A "grave" decision

What the editorials said

Macron is taking an astonishing gamble, from a position of weakness, said The Guardian. His bet is that voters who backed the RN in the EU election will balk at the idea of Le Pen's 28-year-old protégé, Jordan Bardella, becoming France's PM. He may also think that a period of "cohabitation" with an RN-led government would expose its "unfitness for office", reducing its threat in presidential elections due in 2027. Frankly, he is being reckless, said Le Monde. Owing to his failure to address the grievances of the RN's supporters, which are "much deeper" than immigration, there is a real risk that a party that is pro-Russia, and critical of Nato, will achieve power in France. At a time when a war is raging in Europe, this is not a prospect to take lightly.

Macron knew he'd have to act sooner or later, said The Economist. For the past two years, he has presided over a minority government that has struggled to pass legislation; he has faced 28 no-confidence motions. By calling an election at a time of his choosing, he has seized back the initiative. But voters may just deliver another hung parliament.

It wasn't all bad

Around 20,000 motorcyclists took part in a 300-mile procession from London to Barrow-in-Furness last Saturday, to pay tribute to the TV chef and "Hairy Biker" Dave Myers, who was born in Barrow, and who died in February, aged 66. The event raised more than £80,000 for charity. The police said there had been no major incidents, and thanked the bikers for their safe driving. Myers's fellow Hairy Biker, Si King, told the crowd that his late friend would have been "very proud".

An Army veteran is set to become the first commercial pilot without legs since Sir Douglas Bader. Luke Sinnott, 43, lost both his legs in an explosion in Afghanistan in 2010. He is now training to pilot commercial aircraft, having been fitted with advanced prosthetics that enable him to work the foot pedals of large aircraft. "After I joined the Army I wanted to fly Apache helicopters. I was due to start training up after the tour where I got injured," Sinnott said. "I thought that avenue was closed off to me. I never imagined I would fly again." An RAF flying ace during the Second World War, Bader later flew for Shell.



A 100-year-old D-Day veteran and his 96-year-old fiancée married near the beaches of Normandy last weekend. Harold Terens, originally from New York, served in the US army from 1942 to 1945 as a radio technician. He met Jeanne Swerlin, also from New York, in 2021. Both had been widowed. Terens said he'd wanted to marry in Normandy so that his comrades who'd died on D-Day could attend "in spirit". After the ceremony, the newlyweds attended a state dinner at the Élysée Palace, where they were toasted by President Macron.

COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

What the commentators said

Why unveil a manifesto at Silverstone? It was symbolic, Sunak said, of the fact that the economy has “turned a corner”. But another analogy, said Rachel Cunliffe in *The New Statesman*, would be that “the wheels have come off”. The conference space at the racetrack was full of banners heralding “Bold Action”; a more accurate slogan would have been “More of the same”. Given how far the Tories are behind in the polls, some are surprised the manifesto wasn’t bolder. “If you’re writing cheques you know you’ll never have to actually cash, why not go for broke?” The Tory Right had wanted a commitment to leave the ECHR and the abolition of inheritance tax.

The manifesto is misleading enough as it is, said John Rentoul in *The Independent*. It promises £17bn of tax cuts on the basis that the Tories would slash welfare spending by £12bn a year, and save billions more via a crackdown on tax avoidance and civil service cuts. This is “pie in the sky – precisely the type of nonsense that Sunak so rightly criticised Liz Truss for peddling in the Tory leadership campaign”. Paul Johnson, the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), admitted to what he called “a degree of scepticism” about the idea of “definite giveaways” being paid for by “uncertain, unspecific and apparently victimless savings”, said Jack Kessler in the *Evening Standard*. “Which is independent economics research institute speak for: srsly?”

We should be sceptical of both the main parties on this front, said Oliver Wright in *The Times*. Under current plans, real-terms public spending is due to rise by just 1% over the three years from 2025. Once you take account of bigger rises for the NHS and defence, it implies annual reductions of about 4% for other services, according to the IFS. That amounts to £20bn in cuts – “about half the size of George Osborne’s austerity programme”. Neither of the main parties are being honest about this looming squeeze. It is “stretching credulity to snapping point to suggest, as Labour does, that it can significantly improve the public realm without imposing some tax increases that it has yet to reveal”, agreed Andrew Rawnsley in *The Observer*. Alas, for a proper, grown-up debate about the public finances, we’ll have to wait until after the election.

What the commentators said

“The people of Europe are in revolt.” That’s what the EU elections showed – even if some voters probably did use them as a “free hit”, said Daniel Hannan in the *Daily Mail*. In France, the RN won in almost every region. In Belgium, PM Alexander De Croo resigned after his party lost to right-wing nationalists. And in Germany, the AfD won a record 16% of the vote, despite a slew of recent scandals. It is clear that voters are fed up with inflation and “eco-posturing” (Green parties did especially badly) and want tough action on immigration. The EU’s disastrous rightward lurch, fuelled by young voters, was most pronounced in France and Germany, its two largest states, said Timothy Garton Ash in *The Guardian*. But it was also evident in countries such as Austria, the Netherlands and Italy. And although triumphant Eurosceptic parties won’t be tempted to try “Frexit, Dexit or Nexit”, they’ll surely “pull the EU to the right from inside”, taking a hard line on migration while opposing green policies and aid for Ukraine.

Talk of a far-right takeover in Europe is overblown, said Fraser Nelson in *The Spectator*. Left-wing and centrist parties did well in Denmark and Spain, and incumbent nationalists were punished in Sweden and in Hungary, where a new centre-right party gained ground on Viktor Orbán’s Fidesz. “So how do things look now? The same as they did before.” Pro-EU parties still command a majority in the EU parliament, and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen looks set to secure another five-year term. Still, the results will create problems for Keir Starmer if he becomes PM, said James Crisp in *The Daily Telegraph*. He has assiduously courted Macron and Scholz ahead of the negotiations he’d like to have with Brussels on issues such as trade and migration. But their standing is diminished, and newly influential figures like Meloni and Le Pen won’t have much appetite to strike, say, a new UK-EU migrant returns deal. In short, “Labour’s plan to forge closer ties with the EU just got a little more complicated.”

What next?

The freezing of tax thresholds means that the tax burden would keep rising even under the Tories’ manifesto plans. As a share of GDP, taxes are set to rise to 36.7% by 2028/29, up from 36.5% today.

Labour, which was due to unveil its own manifesto on Thursday, has ruled out raising income tax, national insurance or VAT, says Tom Newton Dunn in the *Evening Standard*, but shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has declined to rule out raising taxes on property. These are likely to feature in her first Budget. Reeves is said to be “looking very closely at an array of tax increases on wealth; and the creation of new council tax bands for more expensive homes is at the top of her list”.

What next?

The head of France’s *Républicains*, Éric Ciotti, has called for an electoral alliance between his centre-right party and the RN in the forthcoming poll. The RN has, until now, been blacklisted by mainstream French parties, and the proposed alliance has been sharply criticised by senior figures in his own party.

Von der Leyen needs the backing of a qualified majority of EU leaders (15), and an absolute majority of MEPs if she is to keep her job as Commission president. A decision on her future is due to be taken at a European Council summit starting on 27 June.

THE WEEK

Only three weeks to go now! If this election campaign has been exhausting to watch, just think how it must feel for the leaders of the main parties. They’ve been working nonstop since the vote was called, criss-crossing the nation to make speeches, shake hands, give interviews and unveil policy positions. And all for what? Some election campaigns have a significant impact on the result. The one before the 2017 vote, for instance, transformed the political dynamic. The Tories started out some 20 points ahead under Theresa May, but ended up losing their majority. The outcome of this campaign, however, seems predetermined, whatever Rishi Sunak does. In the much-quoted words of the Labour leader James Callaghan in 1979: “There are times, perhaps once every 30 years, when there is a sea change in politics. It then does not matter what you say or what you do.” Indeed, given the popular mood, and the eagerness of a bored media to identify further evidence of Tory haplessness, one suspects that Sunak would be better off dispensing with most of his campaign appearances and just staying at home. But then, of course, he’d be accused of hiding in his bunker. So he has little choice but to press on with the hectic round of speeches and events. This is one of the puzzling aspects of the PM’s decision to cut short his attendance of last week’s D-Day commemorations. You’d have thought he would have been eager to linger, if only to enjoy more respite from his thankless life on the campaign trail.

Harry Nicolle

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Controversy of the week

The D-Day fiasco

“There are moments in each election that crystallise the entire campaign,” said Isabel Hardman in *The i Paper*. In 2010, it was Gordon Brown calling a voter a “bigoted woman”. In 2015, it was Ed Miliband standing in front of what looked like an enormous tombstone engraved with Labour’s pledges. Now 2024 has “gained its moment”. It was Rishi Sunak leaving the D-Day 80th anniversary commemorations early, so that David Cameron had to take his place in line-ups with Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron at the final ceremony. Initially, his absence “raised a few eyebrows”. But when it emerged that he had left to do a pre-recorded interview with ITV, which didn’t even air until this week, “all hell broke loose”. “Tory MPs were in meltdown.” Conservative party headquarters didn’t know what to say. Eventually, amid heavy criticism, Sunak apologised.



Sunak on his curtailed trip to Normandy

It’s baffling, said Matthew Parris in *The Times*. The PM should have known how angry many people, particularly core Tory voters, would be. “Even by the coldest of electoral calculations, Sunak should have seen that a global A-list photoshoot into which Keir Starmer could not insert himself was an opportunity worth grabbing.” Anyone could have told him this. Even ChatGPT, when I asked, said that missing the event for a TV interview “could be seen as prioritising personal political gains over national and historical responsibilities, which might not be well received”. This was only the latest in a long stream of unforced errors, said Jonn Elledge in *The New Statesman*. Others have included: calling an election without consulting his Cabinet; failing to check the weather forecast when making the announcement; and giving a whole speech, in Stoke-on-Trent, with his back to the cameras. Even his “Labour’s tax bombshell moment” in last week’s debate rebounded when the top Treasury civil servant confirmed that the £2,000 figure the PM quoted was not, as he had claimed, a civil service figure. Sunak can’t help blundering because he’s utterly “out of touch”, said the *Daily Mirror*. In the ITV interview itself, he was asked what, if anything, he had ever “gone without” during his childhood. He struggled, before answering: “Sky TV”.

“Bruised by the D-Day fiasco”, the PM spent the weekend drawing up plans “for a bounce back”, said Anne McElvoy in *The i Paper*. His strategy is “to return the conversation to economics and taxation”, in order to pick up some “wavering, more prosperous voters in the closing weeks”. The polls suggest this will be difficult, said Robert Ford in *The Observer*. The Tories have the Lib Dems to the left of them, and Nigel Farage to the right of them. Although Starmer’s personal ratings are not “stellar”, Sunak’s are “dreadful”. It was always going to be a hard campaign, but the PM has made it worse with his “dubious claims and political pratfalls”. The dial has shifted “from likely defeat to looming disaster”. An “electoral asteroid” is streaking towards the Tory heartlands. “Brace, brace.”

Spirit of the age

The RSC has been mocked for warning audiences about the “bullying in the form of bodyshaming” of Sir John Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In Shakespeare’s comedy, two married women liken Falstaff (who has designs on their husbands’ money) to a whale, “with so many tons of oil in his belly” and refer to him as “a gross watery pumpkin [pumpkin]”.

In an effort to capitalise on the city’s industrial history, developers in Manchester have named a luxury £2.5m penthouse flat The Engels, after the revolutionary socialist Friedrich Engels. He lived in Manchester while researching his 1845 book *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. The flat is in a skyscraper off Deansgate, which was once a slum area.

Good week for:

Disfrutar, a three-Michelin-starred restaurant in Barcelona, which was named the best in the world. It is the first time in nine years that Spain has topped the prestigious World’s 50 Best Restaurants list. A Spanish restaurant also came second. Only two UK restaurants feature: Kol and Ikoyi, both in London.

Hollywood endings, after a plane carrying 180 people made a safe landing, even though its cockpit windscreen had been shattered by hailstones. The Austrian Airlines flight had already been pummelled by turbulence when it flew into a thunderstorm that had not appeared on its radar. Its windscreen burst; its nose cone was torn off and it lost several panels, but though flying blind, the pilot managed to land safely at Vienna’s Schwechat airport.

Bad week for:

Netflix, which is being sued in the US over its hit series *Baby Reindeer*. The drama recounts comedian Richard Gadd’s experience of being stalked and sexually assaulted by a Scottish lawyer named Martha. It is billed as “a true story”, but a woman identified by online sleuths as the “real Martha” says it is wildly exaggerated, and she is now demanding \$170m in damages.

Bulgari, after thieves launched an audacious raid on the jewellers’ store in Rome and escaped with gems worth \$500,000. The gang used the large Roman-era sewer tunnels that criss-cross Rome to drill into the shop’s basement, and fled the same way.

Young drivers, with news that the average cost of insurance for a 17-year-old who has just passed their test is now £3,075, up from £2,004 last year. A new driver of 22 can expect to pay £2,503.

Douglas Ross to resign

The Scottish Conservatives’ campaign was thrown into disarray this week when Douglas Ross announced that he will stand down as leader after the election. He said if he were elected MP for Aberdeenshire North and Moray East, he’d also stand down as an MSP. Ross, who was MP for the abolished seat of Moray, had said he would not stand again as an MP, so that he could focus on his work at Holyrood. But he changed his mind, and was parachuted in to Aberdeenshire North – a seat from which David Duguid had just been effectively de-selected. Tory officials said Duguid was too ill to stand. He insisted he was fit enough. Ross had also come under fire over allegations that he’d used his expenses to pay for travel related to his work as a football linesman.

Youngest murderers

Two 12-year-old boys have become the youngest people to be found guilty of murder since Jon Venables and Robert Thompson were convicted of killing James Bulger in 1993. The pair, who have not been named, attacked their 19-year-old victim with a machete. Shawn Seesahai, from Anguilla, had come to the UK for eye surgery. He was in a park in Wolverhampton when the boys approached him.

Poll watch

More than **70%** of British parents believe that the school system puts too little emphasis on preparing young people for work. *YouGov/The Times*

Only **40%** of 18- to 24-year-olds say they are likely to vote next month. **43%** are still wondering whether to do so, and **17%** say they’re unlikely to vote. Reasons given for not voting include the sense that it will not make a difference (**31%**) and that political parties cannot be trusted to keep their promises (**30%**). *Thinks Insight & Strategy/ Duke of Edinburgh’s Award*

70% of British voters believe the economy is in a bad way. **52%** who feel that way blame decisions made by Liz Truss and her chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng. *Ipsos/FT*

Berlin

Cannabis driving limit: Two months ago, Germany's parliament approved a bill to partially legalise the consumption and cultivation of cannabis; now it has voted through an amendment to make it legal for motorists to drive their cars after having enjoyed a few puffs of a joint. Since April, cannabis users have been permitted to possess 50g of the drug, as long as it has been obtained from licensed growers' associations: now they'll be able to drive after taking a small amount. The limit set is 3.5 nanograms of THC (the active intoxicant in cannabis) per millimetre of blood: a €500 fine and one-month driving ban will be imposed on those who exceed it. The opposition conservative CDU branded the move "absurd", calling it a "black day for transport safety", but the government insists that cannabis users are just being treated the same as drinkers, and that a "safe" amount of the drug won't have any impact on their driving.



St Petersburg, Russia

A public outing: Two of Vladimir Putin's daughters made rare public appearances last week at a forum in St Petersburg often referred to as "Russia's Davos". Maria Vorontsova, 39, an endocrinologist (above), took part in a discussion on biotechnology; tech executive Katerina Tikhonova, 37, joined a talk on protecting Russia's "technological sovereignty". Their mother is the president's ex-wife Lyudmila, whom he divorced in 2014. Putin has never publicly acknowledged his children, and Kremlin sources have been quick to deny any suggestion that he is now grooming them for succession.

Moscow

"Agent" accused: A French academic working as an adviser to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a Swiss NGO that aims to resolve armed conflicts via "mediation and discreet diplomacy", has pleaded guilty to failing to register as a foreign agent while gathering intelligence on the Russian army. Laurent Vinatier joins a growing list of foreign nationals held in Moscow on spy charges: he faces up to five years in prison if convicted. Days earlier, a former Russian soldier had been arrested at a Paris hotel, as Presidents Biden and Zelensky were visiting the city. He was found with explosives and charged with conspiring to commit a terror attack. Officials suspect him of being part of a Moscow-inspired plot.

Florence, Italy

Knox conviction upheld: Amanda Knox's conviction for slandering Patrick Lumumba – the bar owner she wrongly named as Meredith Kercher's killer in the infamous 2007 murder case – has been upheld by a court in Florence. In 2009, Knox and her ex-boyfriend, Raffaele Sollecito, were convicted of murdering Kercher, the British student who'd been Knox's flatmate in Perugia. The pair spent four years in jail before their conviction was overturned on appeal in 2011. But Knox's conviction for slander – for which she was handed a three-year sentence served during her time in jail – has never been quashed, despite the European Court of Human Rights ruling in 2019 that her defence rights were violated while police interrogated her. Knox had travelled to Italy for last week's closed-door hearing, and broke down in tears when the verdict was delivered.



Kharkiv, Ukraine

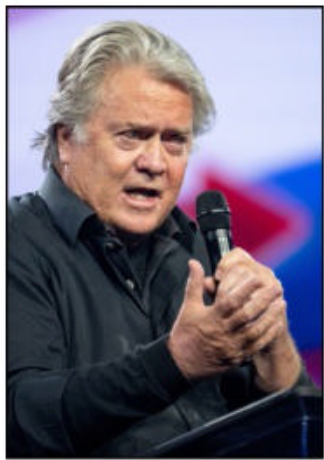
Strikes on Russia: Ukraine struck a number of targets inside Russia over the past week, as it struggles to repel Moscow's incursion into its Kharkiv region. Kyiv has been emboldened in its attacks on Russia by a crucial shift in US policy: while previously the US – along with Nato allies France and Germany – had put a ban on Ukraine using Western-provided missiles to attack targets inside Russia, fearing it could provoke direct conflict with Moscow, it has now given Kyiv the green light to use such weapons to defend its Kharkiv border. The shift already seems to be taking effect: last week, Kyiv destroyed an advanced Russian anti-aircraft system near the border, while on Sunday a Ukrainian fighter jet destroyed a "command node" – the first time one of its fighter jets has struck a target inside Russia. Following the attacks, President Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, claimed Russia's advance on Kharkiv had "stalled".



Ukraine's ability to fight back has, however, been constrained by a dramatic loss in power generation which, it was revealed last week, has more than halved since the war began. Before Russia invaded in 2022, Ukraine's domestic energy production was about 55GW of electricity; currently it stands at less than 20GW. Moscow has recently been targeting power plants, forcing regular outages across the country.

Athens

Surprise backing: Greece's campaign to retrieve the Elgin Marbles won support from an unexpected quarter last week, when officials in Turkey declared there was "no evidence" the Ottoman authorities had given Lord Elgin permission to remove the sculptures some time between 1801 and 1806. The British Museum, which has held the sculptures since 1816, has long maintained that the Ottoman rulers of Athens had granted the Scottish diplomat a *firman* (permit) to cut them from the ruins of the Parthenon and transport them to England. But Zeynep Boz, Turkey's top anti-smuggling official, now denies this ever happened. "Historians have for years searched Ottoman archives," she said, "and have not been able to find a *firman* proving the sale was legal." The only evidence ever adduced in support of the claim, she added, was an edict written in Italian, which didn't appear to come from the Ottoman court.

**Washington DC**

Straight to jail: Steve Bannon (pictured), the right-wing podcaster who served as Donald Trump's chief strategist for the first seven months of his presidency, has been ordered to report to prison by 1 July to serve a four-month term for criminal contempt of congress. He had defied a subpoena to testify before a congressional committee that was investigating the 6 January 2021 Capitol riot. His legal team say the charges were politically motivated, and he is appealing

the federal judge's ruling that he must now begin serving his jail term; he says he'll take it to the supreme court "if necessary".

Boca Chica, Texas

SpaceX success: Elon Musk's dream of colonising Mars moved a step closer last week when Space X's Starship spacecraft – a prototype of the 100-passenger reusable craft that he hopes will transport people to the Red Planet – achieved its most successful test flight to date. Having launched from Boca Chica in Texas, the rocket reached an altitude of 130 miles and travelled halfway round the world at speeds of more than 16,000mph. Its booster, known as Super Heavy, had splashed down intact in the Gulf of Mexico after seven minutes; the upper stage of the spacecraft landed mostly intact in the Indian Ocean an hour later. In the three previous flights, the 400ft-tall rocket – the most powerful ever built – either exploded after take-off, or broke up on re-entry.

**Las Vegas, Nevada**

Christ parallels: Marjorie Taylor Greene, the far-right Republican congresswoman, raised eyebrows at a rally in Las Vegas last week, by likening Donald Trump to Jesus Christ. During her speech, she criticised Democrats for seeking to capitalise on Trump's criminal conviction in his

recent hush-money trial, adding: "You want to know something? The man that I worship is also a convicted felon. And he was murdered on a Roman cross." Her remarks led Democrats to suggest that the GOP had become a "cult", while on X/Twitter a user wondered: "Did Jesus pay off a porn star and cover it up?"

Mexico City

Bird flu death: The World Health Organisation has announced that a strain of bird flu never previously found in a human caused the death of a man in Mexico. An outbreak of the H5N2 strain was discovered in western Mexico in March. It wasn't thought to pose a risk to humans, but the WHO has now confirmed that a 59-year-old man with underlying health conditions died from it in Mexico City in April, having been hospitalised with symptoms including shortness of breath. It said it wasn't clear how the man was infected (he hadn't been exposed to poultry or livestock), but said the risk of human-to-human transmission of H5N2 remained low.

Port Everglades, Florida

Cocaine haul: The US Coast Guard seized \$63m of cocaine earlier this month following a deadly shoot-out in the Caribbean Sea, off the north coast of Venezuela. During an operation with the Dutch navy in international waters, officials engaged a speedboat suspected of carrying narcotics, and ordered it to stop. Instead, it reportedly changed course and accelerated towards the Dutch navy vessel – at which point officials opened fire. The speedboat burst into flames and started to sink, and three suspected smugglers went overboard; a search operation was suspended without any of the suspects having been recovered. Coast Guard officers – who stressed that they had been acting in self-defence – later retrieved 2,177kg of cocaine from the sunken boat, which was taken to Port Everglades in Florida for unloading.

Wilmington, Delaware

Biden guilty: Hunter Biden has been found guilty of all charges at his criminal trial in Delaware. The jury decided that Biden, the only surviving son of President Joe Biden, had lied about his drug use while buying a gun in 2018. He could now face up to 25 years in jail (though he is highly unlikely to be given the maximum term). The verdict followed days of painful testimony about his drug addiction. The prosecution's witnesses included his former sister-in-law Hallie Biden, who said that she had begun an affair with Hunter in late 2015, when they were both mourning the death from cancer of her husband, his brother Beau. She testified that Hunter introduced her to crack cocaine, and that they both used the drug until 2018. Kathleen Buhle, his former wife, recalled scouring the family car for drug paraphernalia before letting their daughters get into it. Joe Biden has ruled out pardoning his son.

**Bogotá**

Israel protest: The government of Colombia has announced that it is suspending coal exports to Israel in protest over the war in Gaza. Israel is estimated to obtain more than 50% of its coal from Colombia, and to rely on the fossil fuel for about 20% of its electricity production; however, exports to Israel only account for a small fraction of Colombia's total coal exports. Israel and Colombia were once close military and commercial allies, but the country's leftist president, Gustavo Petro, broke diplomatic ties earlier this year. He says coal exports will only resume when "the genocide" stops. Turkey recently suspended all trade with Israel, and this month the Maldives said it would no longer allow entry to Israeli passport holders.

Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories

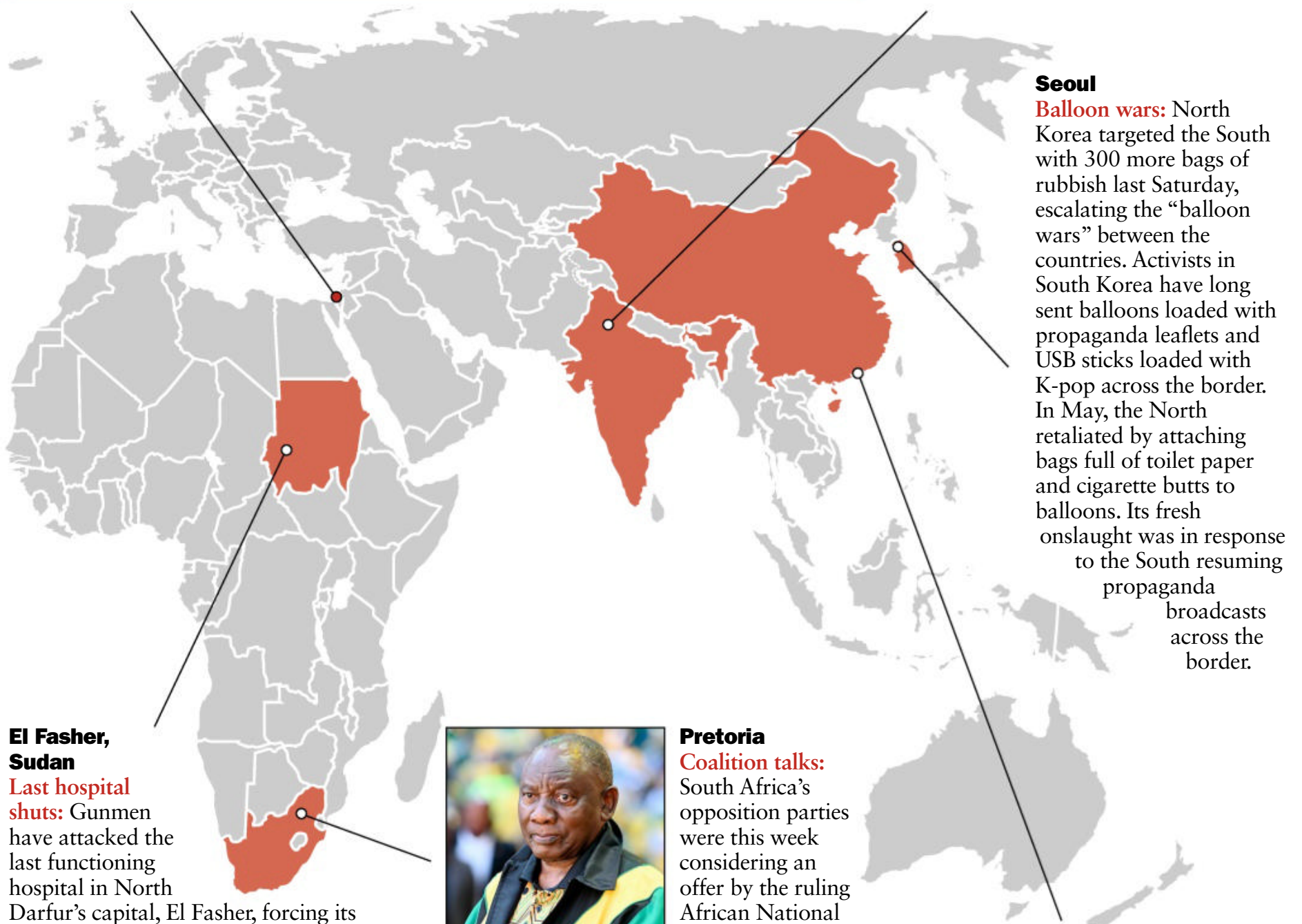
Hostage operation: Israeli special forces freed four hostages (including Andrey Kozlov, right) last Saturday, in a raid that drew international condemnation for its high civilian death toll. The hostages – three men and a woman – were reportedly being held in two apartments in the Nuseirat refugee camp, in central Gaza. To reach them, Israeli special forces are said to have driven into Nuseirat in a truck piled with furniture, disguised as displaced Palestinians. The operation was supported by an intense aerial bombardment, which killed scores of Palestinians – at least 270, according to the Hamas-run health ministry. Josep Borrell, the EU's top diplomat, called it a "massacre"; Israel said fatalities were unavoidable, as the civilians were embedded in a civilian area. One Israeli officer was killed.

The next day, Benny Gantz resigned from Benjamin Netanyahu's war cabinet. He had threatened to do so if the PM had made no plan for "the day after" by 8 June. This week, the UN Security Council voted in support of the ceasefire plan unveiled by Joe Biden two weeks ago. Only Russia abstained. The US-drafted resolution says Israel has agreed to the deal, though it has not publicly done so, and urges Hamas to as well.



New Delhi

Modi sworn in: Narendra Modi was sworn in as India's prime minister on Sunday, in a ceremony attended by thousands of VIPs, including foreign leaders, Bollywood celebrities and members of the business elite. Modi is the first leader since Jawaharlal Nehru to secure a third straight term, but his power is diminished owing to his party, the BJP, having lost its majority in the recent election (*see page 13*). That leaves him dependent on the backing of the dozen or so smaller parties who make up the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, many of which won only one or two seats. Two regional parties in particular – Telugu Desam Party and Janata Dal (United) – that have 28 seats between them have been identified as "kingmakers". Both are secular, and are likely to force Modi to moderate his Hindu nationalist agenda.



Seoul

Balloon wars: North Korea targeted the South with 300 more bags of rubbish last Saturday, escalating the "balloon wars" between the countries. Activists in South Korea have long sent balloons loaded with propaganda leaflets and USB sticks loaded with K-pop across the border. In May, the North retaliated by attaching bags full of toilet paper and cigarette butts to balloons. Its fresh onslaught was in response to the South resuming propaganda broadcasts across the border.

El Fasher, Sudan

Last hospital shuts: Gunmen have attacked the last functioning hospital in North Darfur's capital, El Fasher, forcing its closure. Witnesses reported that members of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – who have been waging war on the Sudanese army for the past 14 months – opened fire inside the South Hospital and looted it. Médecins Sans Frontières, which had been supporting the hospital, said only ten patients and a reduced medical staff were present, as most had been evacuated owing to the fighting around it. Days earlier, at least 100 people – including 35 children – were killed in an RSF attack on a village in Gezira province. The war has claimed at least 13,000-15,000 lives, and displaced more than eight million people.



Pretoria

Coalition talks: South Africa's opposition parties were this week considering an offer by the ruling African National Congress to become part of a government of national unity. President Cyril

Ramaphosa made the proposal after the ANC won just 159 of 400 seats in last month's general election – depriving it of an outright majority for the first time. South Africa was ruled by a national unity government between 1994 and 1997, after its first democratic elections, but forming one is expected to be far more challenging now, given the ideological differences between the country's leading parties.

Hong Kong

Judges resign: Three foreign judges have resigned from Hong Kong's top court, exacerbating fears that the territory is sliding inexorably into authoritarianism. The departure from Hong Kong's court of final appeal of British judges Jonathan Sumption and Lawrence Collins, and Canada's Beverley McLachlin, followed the conviction last month of 14 pro-democracy activists under the sweeping national security laws imposed by Beijing in 2020. Sumption called the case "the last straw", and said his presence on the court no longer served "any useful purpose".

Nightmare in New York

When the Blondie guitarist Chris Stein was writing his memoir, he told Tim Lewis in *The Observer*, he was worried readers simply wouldn't believe the "weird-ass" stories he'd collected during his years at the coalface of the music industry. The book certainly contains some crackers – like the time in 1977, when David Bowie was alone with Debbie Harry, then Stein's girlfriend. He asked her: "Can I f**k you?" She replied: "I don't know, can you?" But it is surprisingly clear-eyed about New York in the 1970s and 1980s. Pre-gentrification, the city may have been a creative hotbed, but Stein says that it was a horrible place to live – druggy, run-down and dangerous. In one of the book's more disturbing chapters, he recalls the time a man forced his way into their apartment at knifepoint, tied them up and raped Harry. "Everybody I knew in New York at one point or another said how terrible it was and they wanted to leave," he recalls. "But nobody left."

Rory Stewart's obsession

In his memoir, *Politics On the Edge*, Rory Stewart reserves the worst of his contempt for two fellow Old Etonians, says David Aaronovitch in *The Mail on Sunday*: David Cameron, who is portrayed as supremely complacent, and Boris Johnson. As PM, Johnson effectively ended Stewart's political career by expelling him from the Tory Party; even so, Stewart acknowledges that his feelings about his *bête blonde* are out

of proportion. In fact, he says that it's partly why he is now in therapy: "Why am I so obsessively angry with Boris Johnson? Why do I see him as the representative of the sum of all evils in the world? That's definitely one of the subjects I'm a bit troubled by – how obsessive I am and why I've turned [Johnson] into this kind of emblem of everything that's wrong."

Lemony Snicket's break

Daniel Handler's first book was rejected by 37 publishers, but one of them took him out for a drink because she felt sorry for him, says Tristram Fane Saunders in *The Daily Telegraph*. Over cocktails, Handler pitched her a half-baked idea – "terrible things happening over and over to orphaned children" – and she bought it on the spot. Since then, his *A Series of Unfortunate Events* – written under the pen name Lemony Snicket – has sold 65 million copies, and Handler has had to deal with many "hilariously ironic" encounters with furious parents and school librarians. It's not the content of his stories that upsets them, he says, so much as their blackly comic tone – "just the idea that it's fun to read about other people's misfortune". Sometimes he is asked at what age children should start reading his books. "I always say it has to do with the arrival of irony in the mind. Some people never get that arrival, and so it doesn't matter how old they are, it's not appropriate to them."



Tracey Emin's latest exhibition is called *By the time you see me there will be nothing left* – a reference to the bladder cancer she was diagnosed with four years ago, says Simon Hattenstone in *The Guardian*. "I've had my urethra removed, a full hysterectomy, lymph nodes, part of my bowel, bladder, urinary tract and half my vagina removed," she says. "Seven-and-a-half hours! My surgeon said: 'It doesn't get much bigger than that! Hehehe!'" She chortles at the idea of this. "Whatever. It's cool! I got through it." The cancer has changed her body – she now relies on a stoma – as well as her outlook on life. "For someone like me who spends a hell of a lot of time thinking about the past and hoping for the future, I do spend more time now than I ever have in the present. And it does actually make you happy." It's also led her to give up both smoking and drinking. "When you think you've got six months to live, you really don't want to have a hangover or forget what happened the night before," she explains. "You need every single moment. You want to be aware and heightened – touch, feel, smell, memory, everything." Emin is, she says, astonished by the lucidity with which she now sees things. "It's not just like I'm a better person because I don't drink. It's not as boring as that. Every bit of me feels better. It's like being born again... Like having a second chance."

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs featured the Co-op Group CEO Shirine Khoury-Haq

- 1 *Jamaica Farewell*, traditional, by Lord Burgess (Irving Burgie), performed by Harry Belafonte
- 2 *Ya Taleen Eljabal*, traditional, performed by Rola Azar
- 3 *Better Together*, written and performed by Jack Johnson
- 4 *Fight the Power* by Carlton Ridenhour, Eric Sadler, Hank Boxley and Keith Boxley, performed by Public Enemy
- 5 *Nuthin' But a "G" Thang* by Tracy Curry, Calvin Broadus, Leon Haywood and Frederick Knight, performed by Dr. Dre
- 6 *Supermassive Black Hole* by Matt Bellamy, performed by Muse
- 7* *How Great Thou Art*, traditional, by Carl Boberg, performed by Susan Boyle
- 8 *Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of* by Bono and The Edge, performed by U2

Book: The Koran

Luxury: a photo frame

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:

Bossy machines

"I'm definitely old and getting tetchy at the bossiness of machines. My husband's Kia won't start until he's confirmed he understands the Highway Code. My car won't go on unless the doors are locked, the lights on, my seatbelt buckled and the gear in Park. Everything wants passwords or codes I don't remember. The burglar alarm asks questions I can't answer; the induction cooker-top turns itself off if I put a wooden spoon down on it. And absolutely everything beeps: the fridge, freezer, microwave, dishwasher, vacuum-packing machine. The whole kitchen is talking at me. Why can't I just shut them up?"
Prue Leith in The Spectator

Farewell

Jeannette Charles, Queen Elizabeth II lookalike, died 2 June, aged 96.

Françoise Hardy, French singer-songwriter, died 11 June, aged 80.

Bette Nash, the world's longest-serving flight attendant, died 17 May, aged 88.

Sir Oliver Popplewell, High Court judge who chaired the inquiry into the Bradford City fire, died 6 June, aged 96.

Graham Turner, the BBC's first economics correspondent, died 3 June, aged 91.

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Decarbonising the national grid

In theory, Britain's electricity grid will be carbon neutral by 2035. What will that involve? Is it even possible?

What's the plan?

In 2021, the UK government pledged to decarbonise the nation's electricity system by 2035, "subject to security of supply". Great strides have been taken already. In 1990, renewable energy sources accounted for less than 2% of UK electricity; coal provided nearly 80%. In 2019, zero-carbon sources (renewables plus nuclear) overtook fossil fuels for the first time; today they reliably provide more than half. But there's still a long way to go. Last year, gas was the largest single electricity source (providing 32%), followed by wind (29%), nuclear (14%), imported electricity (11%), biomass such as woodchip (5%), solar (5%), hydro-electric (2%) and coal (1%). There are no specific targets yet, but the rough consensus is that to achieve zero carbon by 2035, around 70% of the UK's electricity will have to come from wind and solar, with nuclear providing around 20%, and the rest from hydrogen, and gas with carbon capture and storage.



Pylons delivering electricity from Hinkley Point

Why do we want to decarbonise the grid?

It's the backbone of the UK's net-zero strategy, to which the nation is committed by the UN climate change accords. The electricity system generated 14% of the UK's carbon emissions in 2022: a total of 56 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. The aim is that the UK's energy will not only be greener, cleaner, more sustainable and less vulnerable to global shocks such as the Ukraine War, but cheaper, too – wind and solar now make power more cheaply, by most measures, than gas. The hope is that transport, heating and industry will also transition from fossil fuels to clean electricity.

How difficult will this be?

Exceptionally. National Grid, which owns much of the UK's electricity distribution network, says it will "require a fundamental upgrade of our electricity grid" at "a pace and scale not seen for generations". Many new energy projects will have to be built and brought online. By 2023, the UK had around 30 gigawatts (GW) of installed wind power capacity, and 15GW of solar power. The government aims to have 50GW of offshore wind capacity by 2030 and 70GW of solar power by 2035. (In addition, the UK's existing nuclear power stations will be retired by 2050, so a new reactor at Hinkley Point C is being built; Sizewell C has been approved; more plants will also, theoretically, be required.) All this means finding investment and negotiating planning permission for individual projects. It also means that the grid itself will have to change.

How will the grid have to change?

It will have to carry much more power. At present, electricity provides about a third of the energy consumed in the UK. As cars and homes electrify, the regulator, Ofgem, expects overall UK generation capacity to grow from 120GW to 300GW by 2035. Second, the grid will have to be rethought. Grids are essentially huge circuits in which supply and demand must be balanced minute by minute. Originally, the national grid was driven by big

power stations built fairly close to large population centres. Demand was predictable, if variable – peaking in the morning as people turn on their kettles, then reducing, then peaking again in the evening when lights and ovens go on. Supply could be modified by fossil-fuel power stations that provided variable capacity, from turbines that could be turned on and off. Solar and wind tend to be geographically remote; new transmission lines are having to be built from urban areas to offshore windfarms. And both are intermittent. This problem is especially pronounced during what the Germans call the *Dunkelflaute*, the "dark doldrums" when the sun doesn't shine and the wind doesn't blow.

What problems will this create?

In the past, most power was generated by "baseload" plants with unvarying output, such as coal and nuclear stations, which also provided inertia: kinetic energy generated by the spinning parts of generators, which helps the grid maintain a stable frequency. Such plants were supplemented by "load following" and "peaker" plants, which can adjust output as demand rises. In general, solar and wind can fulfil load following but cannot provide baseload or inertia. They also sometimes provide too much energy as well as too little. Wind farms are paid to switch off when the grid can't handle their electricity: from January to October 2023, "wind curtailment payments" of £590m were paid to wind farms.

How can these be solved?

Grids are changing fast. In the business, they talk about "the three Ds": decarbonisation, decentralisation and digitalisation. Decentralised, carbon-free energy sources can be synced, to keep the grid in balance and optimise the deployment of disparate resources, using advanced software and algorithms. Such grids already exist on a smaller scale in, for instance, Hawaii. But as fossil-fuel plants are reduced in number, electrical storage is required for times of peak demand. At present, the UK has some energy storage: nearly 3GW in pumped storage hydro-electric power stations, and 3.5GW in batteries (see box). It needs more.

Storage methods

Electricity can be stored in a variety of ways, including: gravitationally, by pumping water; electrochemically, in batteries; mechanically, by compressing air; or thermally, as heat. The oldest system is "pumped hydro": when electricity is plentiful, water is pumped from a lower reservoir to a higher one using an electric turbine; when power is scarce, water flows back to the lower reservoir through the same turbine, which spins to create power. This is a large-scale, long-term solution – Electric Mountain in North Wales has been running since 1984 – and it is fairly efficient. But it requires a lot of space and specific geography. Most of the big energy-storage projects in the pipeline in the UK involve lithium ion batteries – 12GW's worth have either been agreed or are awaiting approval. These are also efficient and can be built anywhere, though they use scarce materials and can pose a fire risk: a 2020 blaze in Liverpool took 59 hours to extinguish after a battery storage system went into "thermal runaway".

A recent Royal Society report plumped for hydrogen: creating it using electrolysis, storing it in underground caverns, and burning it when needed for power. But it concluded that the UK would need 1,000 times its current storage capacity to decarbonise the grid.

Will we hit the 2035 target?

It is technically feasible, but it will require political will, careful planning, clear signals to investors – and lots of money. The government expects it to require £275bn-375bn of public and private investment in energy projects, and £50bn-150bn in electricity networks. Much infrastructure – from wind farms and power plants to new pylons and lines – will be, or already is, unpopular with local residents. In May, the Environmental Audit Committee noted a series of basic problems: the absence of storage; long delays in connecting new projects to the grid; the weakness of supply chains; the lack of necessary skills. Like recent reports by the Climate Change Committee, the National Audit Office and other MPs' committees, it decried the absence of a clear, long-term delivery plan for decarbonising the power system.

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Tell enough lies and you get Farage

Matthew Syed

The Sunday Times

Nigel Farage's popularity is built on lies, says Matthew Syed. Not his own lies, mark you, but the lies his critics keep telling about the issue he's made his own: mass immigration. Whether you see it as a good or bad thing, it's undeniable that our main political parties have consistently misled voters over it. In 1997, Tony Blair promised "firm control", only for his party to preside over a net intake of 640,000 between 1998 and 2001. In 2005, he insisted "only skilled workers" would be allowed to settle long term; net migration then ballooned to over a quarter of a million. That was nothing to what the Tories did: in their manifestos they vowed to cut net migration to tens of thousands. What happened? Numbers rose to an average of 300,000 a year – in the past two years to some 700,000 a year. Farage is a "dangerous figure" alright, but it was advocates of the "liberal" consensus, addicted to low-wage labour, who by consistently offering false promises, created the conditions for his rise. Future historians will regard them as "arsonists who took a match to the collective trust on which we all rely".

The deep-rooted seeds of Tory decline

John Burn-Murdoch

Financial Times

Where did it all go wrong for the Tories? Five years ago, they won their largest majority in 30 years, says John Burn-Murdoch: now they're on the verge of electoral wipeout. What happened? People will point to the Partygate scandal, or Liz Truss's calamitous mini-Budget, but these, in the end, were "mere blips" on a downward trend. The real story of the Tory collapse is that the party's triumph in the 2019 election was built on sand. Voters backed the Conservatives primarily to get Brexit done and to keep Jeremy Corbyn away from power, not because they liked the party. Many were also swayed by a manifesto expertly crafted to appeal to the widest possible range of people. It promised levelling up for "red wall" voters in traditional Labour areas, cuts for the Tory base, more NHS funding and lots of ambitious green reforms. But fewer than half of those manifesto pledges have been met, "a marked decline in competence compared with earlier governments". Result? A lot of alienated voters. The Tories' 2019 voter coalition was just "a short-term loan. It is being paid back with interest."

Say farewell to that old-time NHS religion

Janice Turner

The Times

If a relative of yours was on a long NHS waiting list for surgery would you resort to private medicine? Never, no, said Keir Starmer in a recent TV debate: the NHS "runs through my DNA". That reverence for our health service is widely shared among older voters like myself, says Janice Turner. It's reflexive. We can't help feeling it's shameful to jump the queue for treatment, even though by doing so we could be "hastening treatment for someone else who can't afford to pay". Yet fewer and fewer people feel that way. In a recent survey, only 27% of those who said they wouldn't go private cited principles as the reason; and one in eight Britons used private medicine in the year to 2023. And "Gen Z" voters in particular, for all their progressive political views, are happy to do so: much taken with investing in "self-care" treatments – tattoos, say, or a trip to Turkey for dental veneers – they have embraced using private GPs. When even the shadow health secretary, Wes Streeting, says he wants to use private hospitals to bring down waiting lists, you realise that Starmer's "I'd rather die than go private" is "the sentiment of a bygone age".

A policy that's made life hell for the poor

Peter Apps

The Guardian

Of all the damaging welfare cuts made by the Tories in the past 14 years, none has been more pernicious than the repeated freezing of local housing allowance (LHA), says Peter Apps. This benefit is a lifeline for private-sector tenants who can't get a council house and can't afford their rent, yet over the past decade its value has been held down, even as the rates charged by landlords have shot up. The result of this mismatch is that thousands of struggling tenants have lost their homes, and have had to be put up in "temporary" accommodation. The number of households living like this – moving between cheap hotel rooms and other crummy digs – has risen from less than 75,000 in 2016 to 112,660 today. It's not just miserable for them; it's costing councils – who have a statutory duty to house them – a fortune. London boroughs shell out £90m on private accommodation every month: many are shipping poor families out of higher-rent areas to cheaper towns to cut costs. The Tories have been trashing the balance sheets of councils and tearing people away from support networks – and all simply so they "can claim benefits payments are falling".

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

Tourist officials in China have admitted to making a "small enhancement" to a famous waterfall, after a video by a hiker showed that the 1,030ft cascade was actually being fed by a water pipe. Officials explained that the pipe had been installed to make tourists who visit the waterfall during the dry season feel that they have made "a worthwhile trip". Online reviews were divided on the pipe. "The move does not respect the laws of nature nor the visitors," said one user of the social media site Weibo. "Better than seeing no water at all," observed another.



Voters in Brighton will be able to vote for a new kind of politician at the election: an AI MP. "AI Steve" is an avatar and chatbot created by Steve Endacott, a tech entrepreneur. If elected, Endacott will attend meetings and Parliament on behalf of his AI alter ego. Endacott says his candidate "understands the value of money" and is "deeply concerned about global warming but hesitates to join the Green party". If elected, AI Steve will be available to answer thousands of constituents' questions simultaneously, 24/7.

A man who holds the Guinness World Record for the largest collection of fossilised poo has opened a museum in Arizona to showcase his treasures. The Poozeum boasts thousands of faeces fossils, or "coprolites", including the largest ever discovered. Founder George Frandsen says he was motivated to share his collection with the public after noticing the "glaring absence of coprolite representation" in museums.

Biden's border crackdown: too little, too late?

Apparently, there's a migrant crisis on the US-Mexican border, said the [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#). And apparently, Joe Biden has the authority to do something about it. "Who knew?" During Biden's tenure, some eight million people have crossed the border illegally. Only now is he taking urgent action. Last week he issued an executive order designed to slash the number of people illegally crossing into the US. Under the rule, new arrivals (bar a few exceptions, such as unaccompanied minors) will automatically lose the right to claim asylum once illegal crossings exceed a daily average of 2,500 over a week, so making it easy for the authorities to deport them. The border will only reopen to asylum seekers after the number of illegal crossings drops below 1,500 per day. As illegal crossings are currently above the 2,500 threshold – as they have been for more than three years – the restriction took immediate effect.



A Border Patrol US processing camp in San Diego

asylum seekers to return to Mexico while their claims were adjudicated. Now, behind in the polls and eager to placate public concerns, he has rushed out this measure. Yet the 2,500 daily limit is "laughable". Combined with other programmes, it would still allow for the entry of "more than 1.5 million people a year, higher than almost any other point in history".

Biden's executive order is unlikely to survive legal challenges, said Jennifer Rubin in [The Washington Post](#). Trump sought to enact a similar ban in 2018, only to be blocked by federal courts

that ruled it a violation of asylum laws. But it has served a political purpose, by drawing attention to the dishonest tactics of his Republican opponents. Biden explained that he has had to resort to an executive order because the GOP sabotaged a tough bipartisan border security plan earlier this year. Trump told Republicans to block it because he didn't want Biden to secure a legislative "win". Now that his executive order has come under legal fire, Biden may be tempted to launch a fresh effort this summer to get immigration reforms through congress. He'll take any opportunity to highlight his good-faith efforts to address the border and Republicans' jaw-dropping hypocrisy".

It's too little, too late, said Andrew Arthur in the [New York Post](#). When Biden came into office, he encouraged an influx by dismantling many of Donald Trump's effective border measures, such as the "Remain in Mexico" policy, which required certain

Why the billionaires back Trump

Timothy Noah

[The New Republic](#)

For America's billionaire donor class, November's presidential election is about one thing, says Timothy Noah: "Keeping rich people's taxes low." Wall Street plutocrats such as JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, Blackstone Group's Stephen Schwarzman and investor Nelson Peltz condemned Donald Trump after the 6 January attack on the US Capitol, while hedge fund manager Kenneth Griffin called him a "three-time loser" after the 2022 midterms. Yet all four of them, and many others, are now "drifting back to Trump". They claim it's because – take your pick – they're worried about inflation, immigration, or rising antisemitism on the Left. The real reason is that they want to keep the tax cuts that Trump gave them in 2017, which are due to expire at the end of 2025. Biden plans to let the cuts for the wealthy and corporations run out, keeping them only for Americans earning less than \$400,000. Trump intends to extend them for everyone, which would increase the budget deficit by \$4trn over a decade and would be highly inflationary. Nonetheless, super-rich donors are rallying behind Trump, not because they think a second term "will be good for the republic – most know it won't be – but because he will make them richer".

Eye-for-an-eye justice is un-American

Ruth Marcus

[The Washington Post](#)

"Reasonable people can differ about the wisdom of prosecuting Donald Trump," says Ruth Marcus. But whether or not you agree with the decision to try to hold him to account through the courts, or with the guilty verdict handed down in the Manhattan hush-money case, there's no justification at all for the angry Republican calls for revenge prosecutions. Listen to Trump adviser Stephen Miller. "Is every House committee controlled by Republicans using its subpoena power in every way it needs to right now?" he asked on Fox News. "Is every Republican [district attorney] starting every investigation they need to right now?" Steve Bannon, Trump's former strategist, exhorted ambitious GOP district attorneys "to 'seize the day' and own this moment in history". John Yoo, a conservative law professor, called for "retaliation in kind". Then, of course, there's Trump himself, who has made no secret of his desire to get even. "So, you know, it's a terrible, terrible path that they're leading us to, and it's very possible that it's going to have to happen to them," he remarked, menacingly, in the wake of his conviction. There should be no place for "eye-for-an-eye justice" in this country. Officials, journalists and citizens must call it out "for what it is: dangerous, unlawful and un-American".

China is losing the chip war

Michael Schuman

[The Atlantic](#)

China's leader Xi Jinping has a problem, says Michael Schuman. He's desperate to destroy American hegemony, yet his country still relies heavily on US tech. Nothing encapsulates his predicament better than the microchip. While China has caught up with the US in many sectors, it's still a long way behind in semiconductors, particularly cutting-edge chips that fuel new technologies such as artificial intelligence. The newest AI chip developed by US giant Nvidia is 16 times faster than the best sold by China's Huawei. The US and its partners are even further ahead when it comes to the equipment for manufacturing advanced chips. The best Chinese machinery can make chips that are 28 nanometres (nm) wide, whereas cutting-edge equipment can make two-nm chips. Strict US export controls on the semiconductor industry mean Chinese companies have little chance of catching up. Beijing complains that America is trying to hold China back, but the US has no obligation to share its tech with hostile powers. "Xi gambled that he could partner with Russia and Iran, undermine the US-led global order, and build a military designed to challenge American power" – all while benefitting from US know-how. The irony is that China would be further ahead now had he maintained a friendly partnership.

An electoral shock in the world's largest democracy

Ever since he swept to power in 2014, Narendra Modi has towered over Indian politics like a colossus, said Anjali Mody in *The New York Times*. His Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has “captured or subverted nearly every significant institution in India”, from TV networks to government agencies, has tied up rivals in “endless investigations” and has fiddled party finance rules to its benefit. So when the world's largest democracy went to the polls on 19 April, the start of a six-week-long election, almost every pollster expected Modi to secure a third straight thumping victory. But last week it became clear the experts had got it wildly wrong. The BJP didn't just fail to win a landslide; it fell 32 seats short of the 272 needed for a parliamentary majority. The results haven't denied Modi a third term, but he's now reliant on the backing of smaller parties in his BJP-led NDA coalition, which won a total of 293 seats. Make no mistake: he is a diminished figure.



Narendra Modi: a divine birth?

It was hubris that did for Modi, said Vir Sanghvi in *The Print (New Delhi)*. He wasn't content to govern India. He “wanted to remake it”. Convinced he was on the verge of a “historic landslide”, he talked up the chances of his alliance taking more than 400 seats and made himself the face of the BJP campaign in every state. He vowed to entrench his divisive “Hindutva” project to turn India into a majoritarian Hindu-nationalist state; he even claimed his birth was not “biological”, but ordained by God. But voters had other ideas, said Devesh Kapur in *Foreign Policy (Washington)*. Tired of Modi's anti-Muslim rhetoric, his failure to tackle soaring inequality and his inability to create an economy able to supply decent jobs, they abandoned the BJP in their millions. The BJP even suffered big losses in its heartlands in Uttar Pradesh, said Apoorvanand on *Al Jazeera (Doha)*. Worst of all it lost the city of Ayodhya, where in January Modi had inaugurated a temple to Ram on the site of a demolished mosque, a project supposed to guarantee him his landslide.

The decline in the BJP's fortunes is remarkable, said Santwana

Bhattacharya in *The New Indian Express (Chennai)*; but even more so is the revival of the Indian National Congress party. For decades after independence, Congress dominated Indian politics; but in recent years, it has suffered “defeat after demoralising defeat”. Not this time though. Under the guidance of Rahul Gandhi, it won 99 seats, and the INDIA opposition coalition to which it belongs took 234. That's testament to Gandhi, who completed a 2,200-mile walk across India last year in a bid to revitalise the party's

fortunes, and has since been nominated as the opposition leader. The odds were stacked against him, said Sagarika Ghose in *The Print (New Delhi)*. Congress was “relentlessly” ridiculed by our partisan media; Gandhi was portrayed as a puppet controlled by George Soros. Yet to the great benefit of India's “beleaguered democracy”, the voters, especially those from the lower Dalit caste, saw past such coverage and backed Congress.

Let's face reality, said Kapil Komireddi in *The Times*. Those opposition parties now posing as “martyrs for democracy” are for the most part “profoundly anti-democratic entities run for the benefit of the families that own them”. And none more so than Congress, a creature of the Nehru-Gandhi clan. Indira Gandhi outdid Modi for high-handedness when she was in power: in 1975 she suspended habeas corpus and ruled as a dictator. So to talk of her grandson Rahul inflicting a “moral” defeat on Modi is stretching it, to say the least. Nor was the BJP's performance as disastrous as some would have you believe, said Utpal Kumar in *Firstpost (Mumbai)*. It still resulted in a third term for Modi – a feat only achieved twice in India's post-colonial history – and the BJP still won more seats on its own than all of the INDIA coalition parties combined. Even so, Modi has a tough task ahead, said Sidharth Bhatia in *The Wire (New Delhi)*. Humility “is not in his DNA”; yet now he's in coalition, he'll have to show it. The era of Modi running India according to his own whims has come to an abrupt end.

RUSSIA

Don't let the lunatics win Putin's ear

Vzglyad
(Moscow)

Hardliners in Russia are urging Vladimir Putin to up the ante against his enemies, says Sergey Khudiev. Rarely a day goes by without these “patriots” insisting that only the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons will persuade Western states to cut off military aid to Ukraine. Are they insane? Can't these blowhards see that most Russians are terrified of the repercussions this would bring, rightly viewing such a strike as a sure way of endangering not only their lives, but “humanity as a whole”. It would also result in a fatal breakdown of relations with China and India – not to mention Russia's friends in the Islamic world, who justifiably fear the prospect of “radioactive fallout”. And it wouldn't help Russia's war effort in any case. Kyiv is firmly on the back foot in its fight with Moscow; only a “sharp turn of events” can save it. But that's just what detonating an atomic bomb would bring about: by provoking outright war with Nato, it would play right into Kyiv's hands. No, Russia has nothing to gain from a nuclear strike; so please, let us all ignore the lunatics proposing one.

UGANDA

Help refugees beautify their place of refuge

The East African
(Nairobi)

Here's an idea for billionaire philanthropists looking for a good cause, says Charles Onyango-Obbo. Why not help refugees restore some of Africa's glorious landscapes? More than 18 million displaced people, 26% of all the world's displaced, live in sub-Saharan Africa, victims of the ongoing conflicts in Somalia, Sudan and other sub-Saharan nations. With no prospect of resettling in the rich West, they're making homes in camps on their own continent. But this doesn't always have to be a bad thing. In Uganda, a nation with a progressive attitude to refugees, the Kiryandongo camp, populated by 75,000 mostly Sudanese displaced people, has helped turn the neighbouring town of Bweyale into a “multicultural commercial centre”. And some of the 70,000 Nigerians living in northern Cameroon, having fled the violence of Boko Haram, have planted 500,000 trees, transforming a once arid area into a “vast oasis”. Such projects, often backed by NGOs, point to a way forward. A philanthropist could do immense good by buying up unloved and unused land – a disputed border area, say – and then gifting it to refugees to create an enclave in which to unleash their creativity. Wishful thinking? Perhaps. But if it worked, “the African refugee in Africa” might just become a thing of the past.



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New breakthroughs in cancer research...

“Off the charts” trial results

A new lung cancer drug has stopped the disease’s advance for longer than any previous treatment, a result doctors have described as “off the charts”. Although survival rates have improved in recent years, lung cancer remains the most deadly form of the disease, killing around 1.8 million people a year. And in cases where the tumour has spread, the outlook is particularly poor. But in a phase three trial of lorlatinib, well over half of patients with advanced forms of non-small-cell lung cancer were still alive after five years, with no disease progression. For the trial, 296 patients with advanced ALK-positive non-small-cell lung cancer were randomly assigned to receive either lorlatinib, or crizotinib. Both are ALK tyrosine kinase inhibitors, treatments that block the growth of tumour cells. But whereas the five-year progression-free survival rate for crizotinib was 8%, for lorlatinib it was 60%. “To our knowledge, these results are unprecedented,” said lead author Dr Benjamin Solomon of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Melbourne, as he presented the findings at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology in Chicago (ASCO) – the world’s biggest cancer conference.

A blood test for breast cancer

An “ultra-sensitive” blood test can predict a breast cancer relapse with 100% accuracy, much earlier than conventional scans, a study has shown. The test looks for up to 1,800 genetic mutations in the blood released by cancer cells, known as circulating tumour DNA (ctDNA) that have survived previous rounds of treatment. In the trial by the Institute of Cancer Research in London, 78 people who’d had surgery and chemotherapy to



...presented at the ASCO conference this month

treat breast cancer were given the test every six months for five years. These revealed that 11 of them had ctDNA in their blood, all of whom relapsed. None of the others did. On average, the test picked up the relapsed cancer 15 months before it became detectable by other means, but in one case, the gap was 41 months. Scientists said the “liquid biopsy” (which is still being tested) could enable earlier treatment, increasing patients’ odds of survival. A separate study by the Institute of Cancer Research, also presented at ASCO, has found that a cheap at-home spit test could be used to screen all middle-aged men for prostate cancer. For this trial, 6,100 men were sent spit tests, the results of which were used to give them genetic risk scores. The 10% with the highest risk were then invited in for further tests, which revealed that 187 men (40% of the group) had cancer. The study’s lead author, Prof Ros Eeles, said the test could “turn the tide on prostate cancer”.

Vaccine trials steam ahead

A number of studies presented at ASCO highlighted the growing promise of cancer vaccines. Trial results of the world’s first personalised mRNA vaccine for melanoma, for instance, suggested that the vaccine can halve the risk of patients dying or the disease returning. In the phase two trial, patients with stage two or three melanoma, and who’d had most of their tumour removed, were given either the experimental vaccine, developed by Moderna and Merck, and the immunotherapy drug Keytruda, or the drug treatment alone. After three years, those who had received both treatments had a 49% lower risk of cancer recurrence or death than those who’d just had Keytruda. These vaccine therapies, which are being developed for a range of cancers, involve using samples of tumours from each patient to create a custom-made jab, which will prime their immune system to identify and kill cancer cells. None has yet been approved, but the NHS has just launched a nationwide scheme to fast-track patients onto suitable clinical trials.

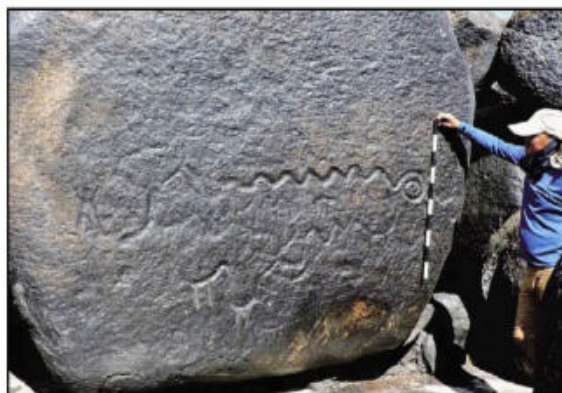
Ozempic may reduce cancer risk

GLP-1 agonist drugs such as Ozempic, which are used to treat obesity and diabetes, can also cut the risk of cancer, according to a study discussed at ASCO. A team at Case Western Reserve University in the US looked at the rates of 13 obesity-related cancers in 34,000 obese people. They found that taking a weight-loss drug for a year, and having bariatric surgery, were both associated with a 19% reduced risk of cancer – although the patients who had the surgery had lost a lot more weight. This, said the team, suggests that the effect of the drug is partly down to some other factor, such as reduced inflammation.

Ancient engravings on the Orinoco

Mysterious rock engravings – including looping images of snakes – were spotted by travellers on the banks of the Orinoco River in South America some 300 years ago; but their location was not precisely described, and they did not enter the records of Western scientists. It was not until 2015 that archaeologists went in search of them – and, aided by drones and other modern technology, they found rather more than they anticipated. In a new report, they describe finding engravings at no fewer than 157 sites. In 13 of these, the images are more than 12ft tall; 60 engravings stretch to more than 30ft, and one is 130ft long. They estimate that, in total, there are 10,000 along the river in Colombia and Venezuela.

The engravings are of human figures, insects, bats and rodents, but mainly they are of snakes. The archaeologists believe they were created up to 2,000 years ago by indigenous peoples, in whose mythology snakes appear as creators (shaping the course of the river), protectors and predators; and that they were used as territorial markers. Owing to their size, some would have been visible from hundreds of metres away.



Snakes figure prominently on the rocks

The most distant galaxy

Nasa’s James Webb Space Telescope has captured an image of the most distant galaxy in the known universe; owing to the time it takes for light to travel, JADES-GS-z14-0 appears as it did just 290 million years after Big Bang, when the universe was in its infancy. But the new galaxy is not just remarkable for its distance, but also for how big and bright it is. The most luminous galaxies tend to produce most of their light via gas falling into supermassive black holes, but at 1,600 light-years in diameter, astronomers say that JADES-GS-z14-0 is too big for this. Instead, Nasa believes that the light is being produced by young stars. “This much starlight implies that the galaxy is several hundreds of millions of times the mass of the Sun,” said the team. “This raises the question: how can nature make such a bright, massive and large galaxy in less than 300 million years?”

Pick of the week's Gossip

Gyles Brandreth has been keeping a diary since he was about 11 – a habit that helped him bond with **Tony Benn**, perhaps the most prolific diarist of his day. “It’s a dreadful burden,” the Labour MP told him, “but you’ll be grateful in the end.” In later life, Benn dictated his entries, which led to the odd error. “He told me how he had found ‘cuddly Pooh’ in the middle of one entry, and that it had taken him a while to work out that the sentence should have read ‘Cudlipp, who...’”



Kameron Saunders, a dancer on **Taylor Swift's** Eras tour, was mindful of all the potential pitfalls before he posed in a kilt in Edinburgh last week. “I’ve always wanted an authentic kilt but I wanted to be super respectful about the culture, so prior to purchasing I had an extensive conversation with the salesman who educated me so very wonderfully about kilts, accessories, Scottish history, Scottish last names, tartans, the thistle,” he said on Instagram. “He assured me that I could wear this outfit with pride. So that’s what I’m doing!”

David Bowie was a polymath, says his former PR **Alan Edwards** in his new memoir. But he was not “a football person” until the 2002 World Cup, when he became obsessed by it and acquired an “encyclopaedic knowledge” of the players. During one match, “he was calling me up throughout – ‘Do you think they should move the ball up the pitch quicker? Are the defensive tactics right?’ It was like this through the whole tournament – then he never mentioned football again.”

Vaughan Gething: the chaos in Welsh Labour

Just as Keir Starmer is trying to persuade us that he should be entrusted with the keys to 10 Downing Street, the Welsh branch of his party is “doing an excellent job of demonstrating why he should not”, said *The Daily Telegraph*. The fruits of 25 years of continuous Labour rule in Wales since devolution were already dismal: compared with the rest of Britain, it has lower economic growth and poorer standards in both the NHS and education. Now the new First Minister, Vaughan Gething, has pulled off the “remarkable feat” of losing a vote of no confidence in the Welsh parliament, the Senedd, just 77 days into the job, said **Jawad Iqbal** in *The Spectator*. The vote – called by the Conservatives in response to a row about Gething’s campaign funding – is non-binding, and he insists he will carry on in the role. But it’s a giant blow to his authority, and “poses a significant problem” for Starmer, who has repeatedly backed him as Welsh leader.



Gething: no confidence

Can Gething survive? It’s unlikely, said *The Guardian*. His loss in the vote (by 29 to 27) has opened a “trapdoor”; the “tiniest slip and he will plummet through it”. Although Labour is set to do well in Wales in the general election, Gething’s personal ratings are poor: only 21% of voters approve of him. Next time, opposition

parties could call a confidence vote in the government itself – and that result would be binding. Frankly, the way he won the Labour race to succeed **Mark Drakeford** was always going to store up problems for him, said **Richard Wyn Jones** in the same paper. Bad enough was the way the big unions tipped the scales in his favour; even worse was his decision to accept a £200,000 donation for his leadership campaign from a firm controlled by a man who had been convicted of environmental crimes. It meant the legitimacy of his “wafer-thin victory” over his rival, **Jeremy Miles**, was always going to be open to doubt; yet instead of using his first few months in office to rebuild bridges with the 17 Labour members who voted for Miles (six more than the 11 who voted for him), he further alienated them with his high-handed manner, while annoying others by distancing himself from Drakeford-era policies.

Tellingly, he only lost the no-confidence vote because two Labour members called in sick, said *The Times*. With no Senedd election due until 2026, his continued presence as First Minister “condemns Welsh politics to paralysis”. Gething, who wept publicly before the vote, appears intent on toughing things out. “However, history suggests that such affairs usually end in tears.”

Literary festivals: attacked from within

In just a few decades, Britain’s literary festivals have become “as vital and as pleasing a part of the nation’s cultural diary as the FA Cup or the Proms”, said *The Observer* – the key difference being that they tend to be a lot cheaper to attend. “Popular and vibrant”, they give writers a chance to reach new readers; provide a forum for discussing controversial ideas; and boost local communities (including with free events for schools). But for how much longer? Last week, one of the biggest sponsors of literary festivals – the asset manager **Baillie Gifford** – announced that it was pulling out of its remaining partnerships in response to what it called a “misleading” campaign by **Fossil Free Books (FFB)**, a collective of “book workers” that accuses the firm of being implicated in “fossil fuels [and] genocide”. Two book festivals, Hay and Edinburgh, had recently ended their associations with Baillie Gifford, after staff came under pressure and some speakers pulled out in solidarity with FFB’s demands – including the singer **Charlotte Church** and comic **Nish Kumar**.

FFB’s activities have caused anger and anxiety in the book world, said **John Gapper** in the *FT*, and with good reason – because if Baillie Gifford isn’t pure enough for the group, what corporate sponsor would be? An asset manager, it invests billions on behalf of pension funds and others,

only 2% of which goes into firms with links to fossil fuels (including **Tesco**, owing to its petrol stations), versus a market average of 11%; it invests far more money in green tech. As for genocide, this refers to its investments in the US tech giants **Amazon**, **Alphabet** and **Nvidia**, which have deals with the Israeli government. If these links mean Baillie Gifford is tainted, then so is any writer whose books are sold on Amazon, and anyone who – like FFB – uses Alphabet’s Gmail. This is a shallow campaign that is harming the nation’s literary life while achieving nothing. Writers must find the courage to resist it.

Literary festivals – often small affairs, locally organised – may seem an odd target for climate activists, said **James Marriott** in *The Times*: there are far more “consequential foes” in the wider industry. Netflix, for instance, says its carbon footprint is 1.5 million tonnes a year. The point, though, is that arts organisations are unusually susceptible to activists’ bullying because, these days, they assert their relevance not by reaching big audiences, but by being “morally improving” and righteous. Hence galleries full of lectures “about Cézanne’s links to imperialism”. They should have more confidence: the arts “matter for more than merely political reasons”. Spending a week in the sun talking about books, poetry and ideas can be “a virtue in itself”.

The Lib Dems: a bold manifesto

The launch of the Liberal Democrat manifesto this week was “refreshingly gimmick-free”, said Will Dunn in *The New Statesman*. Ed Davey “did not arrive by paddleboard, nor did he use a yellow hammer to smash through a blue wall”. Instead, he spoke movingly of his experience as a carer, first for his mother, who died when he was 15, and then for his disabled son, John.



Davey with John, 16, in his election broadcast

A £8bn health and social care package is one of the key measures of the Lib Dem manifesto, which also includes pledges to clean up rivers, reopen bus routes, reform capital gains tax and ensure that all burglaries are investigated. With the Tories in disarray, the Lib Dems sense an opening, said John Oxley on *UnHerd*. Their party was reduced to 11 seats in the 2019 election, but polls suggest it could win 50 or more in the forthcoming one, overtaking the SNP to become, once again, the third-largest party in the Commons.

In true Lib Dem fashion, the party has a few barmy ideas up its sleeve, said Ross Clark in *The Spectator*. Its manifesto proposes, for instance, that local councils should be able to impose a 500% council tax surcharge on second homes. Fortunately, the Lib Dems are not heading for government, “so those nice Lib Dem voters in Richmond and Kingston who have

boltholes in Salcombe, Southwold and so on can still afford the luxury of voting for the party without having to face the cost of its policies”.

“It’s easier to be bold when you aren’t on the verge of power,” said Max von Thun in *The Guardian*. But at a time when Labour is sticking to “an increasingly conservative economic script” for fear of scaring off voters, we should welcome the way the Lib Dems are highlighting issues such as social care and their long-term ambition to rejoin the EU’s single market. They could help “prevent a future Labour government from drifting too far to the right, and – hopefully – push it to be a little bolder as well”. The Lib Dems are offering some candour about the tax rises required for their reforms, said *The Times*. They’re proposing to raise £4bn more from financial institutions, and £5bn by reforming capital gains tax. Ultimately, though, their manifesto remains “a fantasy prospectus for a government that will never exist”. Forget the policies it contains. What really matters is Davey’s decision “to strike a silent but de facto non-aggression pact with Labour”. The tactical voting this encourages, combined with the rise of Reform UK and the disillusionment of many Tory voters, “could combine to inflict upon the Conservative Party an epochal defeat”.

Wit & Wisdom

“That’s not a chip on my shoulder. That’s your foot on my neck.”

Malcolm X, quoted in *The New Arab*

“Nothing so needs reforming as other people’s habits.”

Mark Twain, quoted on *Aeon*

“A liberal is a conservative who has been arrested.”

Tom Wolfe, quoted on *Politico*

“Talent is more erotic when it’s wasted.”

Don DeLillo, quoted on *UnHerd*

“Aside from that, Mrs Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?”

Attrib. Tom Lehrer, quoted in *The River Reporter*

“I want AI to do my dishes and laundry so I can do art and writing, not for AI to do art and writing so I can do my dishes and laundry.”

Joanna Maciejewska, quoted on *Medium*

“The best arguments in the world won’t change a single person’s point of view. The only thing that can do that is a good story.”

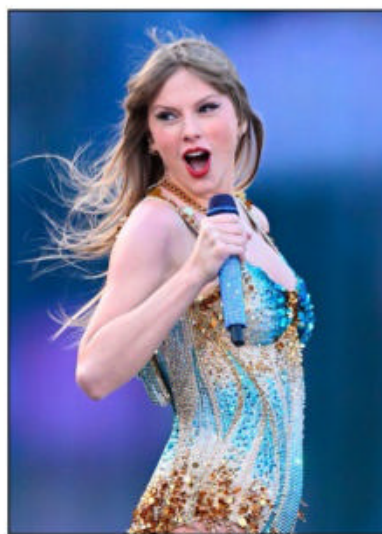
Richard Powers, quoted on *PBS*

“Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States.”

W.E.B. Du Bois, quoted in *The New York Times*

Swift-mania: Tay Tay arrives in the UK

“The Taylor Swift juggernaut rolled into Scotland” last weekend, said Will Hodgkinson in *The Times*, “and Edinburgh was hit with a tsunami of pink cowboy hats, sequinned outerwear, and unusually good behaviour.” Swift’s Eras tour, the highest-grossing of all time, began its UK leg at Murrayfield Stadium on Friday night. “Oh hey!” she said as the show began, “managing to sound surprised” at bumping into 73,000 fans. Swift is “the biggest musical phenomenon of her era”, said Mark Savage on *BBC News*.



On stage in Edinburgh

To mark her arrival, trams were adorned with her picture; Edinburgh Zoo named two newborn monkeys “Taylor” and “Swift”; Loch Tay was rebranded “Loch Tay Tay”. The Murrayfield show, Scotland’s biggest-ever concert, was the first of 15 UK dates, which will culminate in a record-breaking eight nights at London’s Wembley Stadium. By then, Swift will have played to almost 1.2 million UK fans, “with an average ticket price of £206”.

Well, the audience in Edinburgh got their money’s worth, said Annabel Nugent in *The Independent*. Most concerts feature fewer than

20 songs. At every performance on this tour, there are 45, as Swift recreates each “era” of her career. Fans sung along euphorically, “mainlining dopamine for three hours straight”. Throughout the evening, I saw girls crying – “wailing, swooning, hugging” – “Beatlemania-style sobs” and “wet, mascara-strewn cheeks”. It was “almost a spiritual experience”, said Rachel Mackie in *The Scotsman*. “This was one of those times that I could say ‘I was there’.” This “was my generation’s Woodstock”; our version of Oasis at Knebworth. But Swift made it feel “intimate” too, like “a basement pub gig”.

The Swifties gave “the chilly old city a terrifically sweet and warm-hearted feeling”, said Melanie Reid in *The Times*. Pavements thronged with teenage girls, “with eager, hopeful faces”, on their “mass pilgrimage”. Many older people don’t get it: Swift’s songs don’t seem that amazing, and she’s not “impossibly gorgeous”. What’s the secret? “The point is that it doesn’t matter. What matters is that the joy she brings is harmless and genuine.” You’d have needed a heart of stone to have begrudged her fans their fun.

Statistics of the week

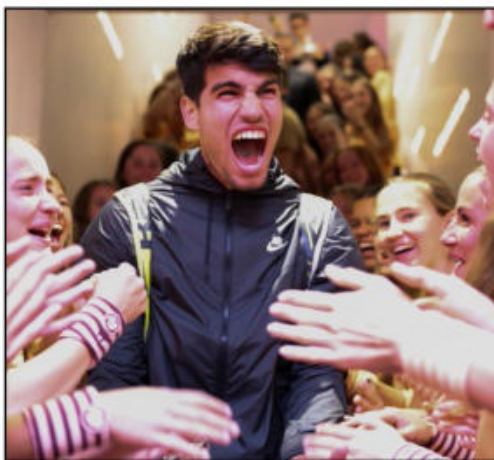
65% of pensioners pay tax on their income, up from 48% in 2010. Among working-age people, 63% pay income tax. **Institute for Fiscal Studies/ *The Daily Telegraph***

One in five (19%) students accepted to the University of Oxford last year were declared disabled, up from 9.5% in 2019. The proportion of British students accepted from state schools fell for the third year in a row to 67.6%. **The Times**

Tennis: the “unstoppable” rise of Carlos Alcaraz

Carlos Alcaraz went into this year’s French Open following a miserable clay-court season, said Tomaini Carayol in *The Guardian*. A forearm injury had caused the Spaniard to miss three of his four planned tournaments, and he was badly hampered in the one event – the Madrid Open – in which he did compete. Such poor preparation would have precluded most players from having any sort of a shot at the Roland-Garros title. But Alcaraz is a “generational talent”, and his explosive, highly watchable game is matched by a “big-match temperament” and resolute self-belief. On Sunday, after “five turbulent, tension-filled sets”, he claimed his first French Open title, with a 6-3, 2-6, 5-7, 6-1, 6-2 victory over the German fourth seed Alexander Zverev. The win makes Alcaraz only the seventh male tennis player to have won a major title on all three surfaces – grass, hard and clay – and, at 21, he is the youngest player by more than a year to have achieved the feat.

After the match, Zverev described his conqueror as “a beast, an animal” who “plays tennis at a different [intensity] to other people”. He’s not wrong, said Simon Briggs in *The Daily Telegraph*. It’s not just the quality of Alcaraz’s tennis, however, that makes him stand apart. In its combination of power, agility and variety, his game also offers something unprecedented. He can “pull winners out of thin air in any number of ways, whether by



Alcaraz: “fresh and exciting”

larruping 100mph forehands or feathering the daintiest of drop shots”. His powers of retrieval regularly induce gasps – as with the single-handed backhand pass he conjured in the penultimate game on Sunday, “all while scooting laterally across the court so swiftly that he could have been on wheels”. And the package is completed by a likeable and ebullient personality, which is confident without being cocky. No wonder there’s a growing feeling that Alcaraz is “becoming the saviour of tennis” – the man who will keep the sport fresh and exciting as the era of Federer, Nadal and Djokovic passes.

Another rare attribute possessed by Alcaraz is an ability to win when not playing his best, said Matthew Lambert in the *Daily Mail*. His form on Sunday was patchy, as it had been in his five-set semi-final victory over Jannik Sinner. He had “two shocking spells”, going from 2-1 to 2-6 in the second set and 5-2 to 5-7 in the third. But when he most needed to, he found his game: he played his best tennis in the final two sets. It’s telling that of the 12 five-set matches he has played, he has won 11. John McEnroe and Boris Becker have both said that he’s a “better player at this age than Federer, Nadal or Djokovic were” – and he’s still clearly some way off his peak. One suspects that once he reaches it, “he will be close to unstoppable”.

Rugby union: Saints triumph in Premiership final for the ages

The Gallagher Premiership has had its travails of late – it lost three clubs to insolvency between September 2022 and June 2023 – but it has never lost its ability to produce matches that “shred your nerves to pieces”, said Stephen Jones in *The Sunday Times*. Saturday’s Premiership final between Northampton Saints and Bath Rugby – the league’s first- and second-placed teams this season – was a case in point: quite simply, this was “one of the greatest finals” that Twickenham (or indeed any stadium) has ever witnessed. The Saints were handed a big advantage when Bath’s Beno Obano was red-carded after 21 minutes for a dangerous tackle, said Robert Kitson in *The Observer*. And for a while, it looked as if that incident would propel them to a comfortable victory. Yet Bath refused to back down, and kept “hammering away at Northampton’s defence”. Although the record books will show that Northampton won the match 25-21,



Obano: red-carded

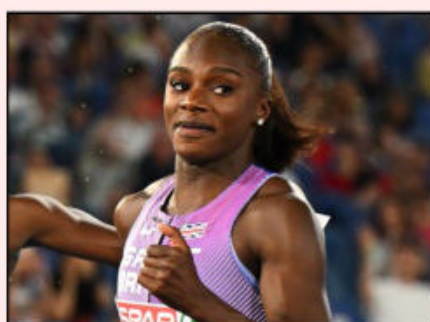
“in many ways it was Bath’s performance that defined the final”. They were the better side throughout the second half, and almost pulled off “one of the all-time great Twickenham escape acts” when they nearly scored a try in the dying seconds.

A trio of “Northampton stalwarts” (Courtney Lawes, Lewis Ludlam and Alex Waller) retire this season, and it’s fitting that these three will end their careers as English champions, said Brian Moore in *The Daily Telegraph*. They leave a “well-run” club that is one of the few in English rugby “that is close to breaking even”. With talents such as George Furbank, Alex Mitchell and Fin Smith, the future looks bright for Saints, said Gerard Meagher in *The Guardian*.

And Bath too have several promising players. Not long ago, Saracens and Exeter dominated English rugby; now, Bath and Northamptonshire feel like “the teams of today and tomorrow”.

Return to form for Britain’s “greatest” sprinter

The past few years have been tough for Britain’s “greatest” female sprinter, Dina Asher-Smith, said Sean Ingle in *The Guardian*. Since winning the 200m at the World Championships in 2019, the 28-year-old has been plagued by injuries, as well as “multiple other bad beats”: she was affected by period cramps at the 2022 European Championships, and a mysterious neurological condition at last year’s World Championships. But at the European Championships in Rome on Sunday, Asher-Smith claimed her 18th major medal, with a victory in the 100m. Remarkably, she won the race despite making “one of the worst starts of her career”, which left her several metres behind her rivals. But displaying



Asher-Smith: remarkable grit

remarkable “grit”, she finished the race in 10.99 sec, just ahead of Poland’s Ewa Swoboda.

Asher-Smith’s return to form is timely, given that “all roads this summer” lead to Paris, said Jeremy Wilson in *The Daily Telegraph*. It comes on the back of her “hugely difficult and emotional decision” last October to part company with John Blackie, her coach since

childhood, and to uproot her entire life by moving from Bromley to Austin, Texas, to work under Edrick “Flo” Floréal. Asher-Smith believes the move has made her better able to cope with pressurised situations. But she still seemed mightily surprised by her victory on Sunday: as she crossed the line, the cameras showed her mouthing the words “F**k me”.

Sporting headlines

Cricket England lost to Australia by 36 runs in their second match of the T20 World Cup. They need wins in their remaining two group games – against Oman and Namibia – to have a chance of qualifying for the semi-finals.

F1 England’s Lando Norris finished second in the Canadian Grand Prix, behind Max Verstappen.

Rugby union George Ford will miss England’s summer tour of Japan and New Zealand with an achilles injury. Steve Borthwick’s 36-man squad for the tour includes six uncapped players.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Global security...

To The Guardian

Jeremy Corbyn writes: "Security is not the ability to threaten and destroy your neighbour. Security is getting on with your neighbour." This may be true in Islington, but how does Mr Corbyn propose that the people of Ukraine, the Baltic states or Poland – and ultimately the UK – "get on" with Vladimir Putin and his forces? One cannot help but be reminded of Neville Chamberlain.

Ted Schrecker, Canada

...and global power

To The Guardian

I agree with Jeremy Corbyn's opinions of Keir Starmer, but I take issue with his view of the actions of Russia. In 2014, Vladimir Putin made it clear that Russia needs neutral buffer states such as Ukraine. Russia lost about 27 million citizens last time it was invaded. It does not have the luxury of oceans on two sides and friendly neighbours on the other two. It would have been simple for Nato and Putin to negotiate neutrality guarantees, but instead Nato pursued a policy intended to plant missiles on the Russian border.

The US knew such a policy would force Putin to act, thereby donating the "moral high ground" to the West. The responsibility for this war in Ukraine lies not with Russia but the US. It is not Russia that poses a threat to world peace, but US militarism.

Andrew Airman, Forres, Moray

D-Day's unsung heroes

To The Times

Ben Macintyre rightly remembers the spies and unrecognised civilians (especially women) who played their part in D-Day. We should also not forget the secret group of specially trained men from COPP (Combined Operations Pilotage Parties) who clandestinely surveyed the proposed invasion beaches.

They swam ashore from small motorboats, collected sand samples, noted defences, mines, hidden sandbanks and beach exits. On New Year's Eve 1943 they could hear the German soldiers celebrating, oblivious to the party working in the cold and wet outside.

Exchange of the week

MPs, potholes, and Putin

To The Times

William Hague believes that electing MPs who were councillors would lead Parliament "towards a meeting of local representatives, each pleading for their own area". Because of this, he says, we do not have MPs who can face up to Joe Biden or Vladimir Putin. I disagree. For decades, voters have complained about MPs being more interested in their careers than their constituents. This has led to disillusionment with politics because local needs are overlooked. Many (not all) local councillors have excelled in national politics. Likewise, many MPs have excelled in working for their constituencies. All MPs must excel at both. We only need a few MPs to perform well on the world stage, but we need hundreds to perform well in support of their local communities.

Andy Boddington, Ludlow, Shropshire

To The Times

William Hague is right that MPs who spend all their time dealing with potholes are unlikely to have a detailed grasp of international issues. However, the same could be said of MPs who devote hours to their second, third or fourth jobs. Working for a foreign pressure group or lobbying for a medical company does not have much bearing on an MP's knowledge of global affairs. Dropping these activities would free up time for MPs to develop a forensic approach to legislative scrutiny, undertake the training needed to become ministers, be fully briefed on how AI could transform public services, and acquire a command of geopolitics. It might even leave them time to deal with the odd pothole.

Tom Brake, director, Unlock Democracy

To The Times

William Hague is dismayed that, increasingly, our MPs are being asked to concentrate on local issues. Here in France there are 35,000 communes with a *mairie* (municipal hall) and a locally elected mayor. They are much more than our parish councils: they are the first port of call for local inquiries and can have responsibility for town planning, housing, schools, cultural activities, and health and social aid. In general, the mayors and their staff are readily approachable and things get done. When President Macron wants to judge the nation's pulse, he consults the communes, because they are close to the people. How I wish Britain had the same.

Kevin Deeming, France

On 5 and 6 June 1944, other men in cramped midget submarines lay submerged for 48 hours, ready to shine beacons out to sea to guide the early-morning invaders to the correct beaches. For D-Day, many different people played their part. If the preparations had leaked, the whole invasion and probably the entire war would have been seriously delayed or even lost.

David McLean, London

A fossil-free festival...

To The Guardian

Nils Pratley shows that the Baillie Gifford literary protest has chosen an inappropriate target. While oil and gas remain embedded in our

economies, the idea of a fossil-free anything – not least the paper and screens on which we read books – is absurd, as is the notion that boycotts can create the changes needed.

Rapid decarbonising poses enormous political challenges and short-term costs that affect us all. That the alternative to no change would be a global disaster does not alter that fact, and pretending otherwise empowers denialists. Right now, we should be asking politicians: what does a future government plan to do about the climate crisis? Writers, of all people, should understand that headlines are not enough.

Mike Pitts, Marlborough, Wiltshire

...is a future dream

To The Times

Further to your report on Baillie Gifford cutting its ties with the Cheltenham Literature Festival, as an ex-partner at Baillie Gifford, and a current director of the Wigtown Book Festival, I'm at a loss to imagine what organisation, including the state, could possibly think itself pure enough to sponsor a book festival.

Edward Hocknell, Tranent, East Lothian

The fallacy of forecasts

To the Financial Times

Helen Miller notes that Labour matches the Conservatives in committing to debt as a share of national income falling by the end of the five-year forecast horizon, and that "this will constrain their choices".

But will it? My dad would have said this rule was as useful as a chocolate teapot. Forecast debt could go up for four years before turning down, leaving debt at the end higher than at the start.

Paul McIntyre, London

The skinny on Ozempic

To The Spectator

Max Pemberton was right when it comes to the weight-loss drug Ozempic. While drugs can be helpful in the short term, a pharmaceutical approach to obesity is not just expensive, it is also illogical in the long term. The combination of near infinite demand, allied to finite funding, will challenge any healthcare system. Drugs are not always the solution.

Sir David Haslam, former chair, NICE, Martinstown, Dorset



"If the EU moves any further to the right, Nigel Farage will want to rejoin it"

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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

Challenger

by Adam Higginbotham

Viking 576pp £25

The Week Bookshop £19.99

In January 1986, “I stood in a classroom of fellow space age kids” and watched the launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger live on TV, said Rachel Slade in *The New York Times*. We were allowed to skip lessons that day because, faced with dwindling public interest in its shuttle missions, Nasa had come up with a PR “gambit” in advance of Challenger’s tenth flight. Among the shuttle’s seven-strong crew was the first non-astronaut ever to ride into space: a high-school teacher named Christa McAuliffe, who was going to conduct lessons from orbit. But as Adam Higginbotham recounts in his superb new book, McAuliffe and her fellow crew members only made it to 46,000 feet. A mere 73 seconds after lift-off, the “ten-storey-tall tank full of liquid hydrogen and oxygen” on which Challenger was riding exploded, instantly blowing the shuttle apart. The reinforced cockpit carrying the crew fell into the Atlantic Ocean and broke apart upon hitting the water. Higginbotham’s “intrepid”, skilfully narrated account of the calamity is a “devastating read”.



The Challenger crew (Christa McAuliffe third from left)

Nasa’s Space Shuttle (which, like the Apollo spacecraft, had originated in plans devised by Nazi rocket scientists) was designed to be a reusable orbiter that would ultimately make spaceflight routine, said Andrew Crumey in *Literary Review*. In the initial stages of flight, it “required extra thrust from two rockets”, which were meant to be jettisoned along with the fuel tank. But to save on costs, these boosters were made from a “stack of overlapping tubes whose joints were sealed with rubber O-rings” – a giant version of the type used in domestic plumbing.

Technicians on the project warned that if these rubber seals “ever sprung a leak” – which was likeliest to happen in cold conditions – the shuttle would explode, said Gerard DeGroot in *The Times*. The weather on 28 January 1986 was freezing – “icicles hung from the superstructure” – but Nasa executives, fearing the costs of delay, demanded that the shuttle should be launched anyway. One of the O-rings “failed almost immediately”, producing a flame which ignited the fuel tank. The investigation suggested that the astronauts were alive during their “three-minute plunge to Earth”. Higginbotham tells the story “meticulously”, teasing out both the technical and human elements. “We become friends” with McAuliffe and her fellow crew members – and feel outraged at the arrogance and negligence that caused their untimely deaths.

Going Home

by Tom Lamont

Sceptre 320pp £16.99

The Week bookshop £13.99

When Téó, a thirtysomething Londoner, agrees to babysit the two-year-old son of his “childhood crush” Lia, events take a tragic turn, said William Pimlott in *Literary Review*. That night, Lia dies by suicide. And since Joel, her son, has no “obvious relatives” (no one seems to know who his father is), Téó gives up his “hard-won independence” to become Joel’s surrogate dad. In less agile hands, such a premise might have been “depressing”, but journalist Tom Lamont pulls off “something remarkable”. With a mix of sensitivity and humour, he captures the “gradual and thorny journey of Téó and Joel towards becoming father and son, almost despite themselves”.

What most impresses about *Going Home* is the brilliant portrait of Joel, said Olivia Laing in *The Guardian*. “It’s rare to read something that captures with such unsentimentality a child’s range, their rapidly shifting obsessions, the quiddities of their language.” Yet Lamont is too shrewd to make this a “one-note book”, said Susie Measure in *The Daily Telegraph*. He tackles other themes, including male friendship and “the role of faith in a secular world”. There are flaws – some of the plotting is too neat – but this is a “sharp”, refreshing debut.

Novel of the week

This Strange Eventful History

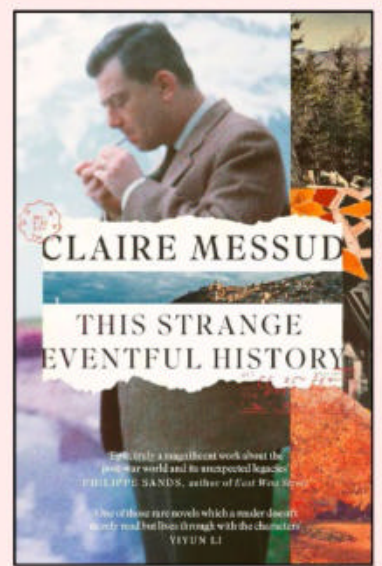
by Claire Messud

Fleet 448pp £20

The Week bookshop £15.99

The American writer Claire Messud is responsible for some of the best-loved literary novels of the past two decades, including *The Emperor’s Children* (2006), said Alex Peake-Tomkinson in *The Daily Telegraph*. For her seventh novel, she has drawn on parts of her own family history to tell the story of “the Cassar clan”, a French-Algerian family. With its title taken from the “Seven Ages of Man” speech in *As You Like It*, *This Strange Eventful History* is a richly satisfying Balzacian saga, and may well be Messud’s “finest book”.

The action begins in the 1940s, with patriarch Gaston Cassar – a French naval officer stationed in Greece – hastily arranging for his wife and two children to return to Algeria from Paris, as the “Germans sweep into France”, said Lucy Hughes-Hallett in *The Guardian*. What follows is an “ambitious and compelling” tale that spans seven decades and crosses multiple continents: as Gaston and his descendants fan out across the globe, the action shifts to Massachusetts, Toronto, Buenos Aires and Sydney. Messud’s brilliance lies in the way she tackles big themes – colonialism, separation, the meaning of home – while delineating her characters with “precision”. Her versatility is astonishing, said Ron Charles in *The Washington Post*: Messud can capture everything from the “panicked mind of a woman realising that the love of her life is an illusion”, to a gossiping crowd at a 50th anniversary party. The results are “magnificent”: I searched hard for flaws, but failed to find any. This is a work of “cavernous depth”.



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Theatre: Viola's Room

One Cartridge Place, London SE18 (punchdrunk.com). Until 18 August Running time: 1hr ★★★★★

For their last production, *The Burnt City*, immersive theatre pioneers Punchdrunk invited masked audiences to move freely around vast “performer-populated environments depicting ancient Troy and the besieging Greek camp”, said Dominic Cavendish in *The Daily Telegraph*. Their new one, *Viola's Room*, is a far more intimate, contained affair, and captivating with it. This time there is no live cast, said Andrzej Lukowski in *Time Out*. Instead, groups of six travel around barefooted through a series of “eerily beautiful” spaces filled with exquisite miniature models and life-sized sets, while listening (via headsets) to Helena Bonham Carter’s recorded narration of the story, a gothicky fairy tale adapted by Daisy Johnson from Barry Pain’s *The Moon-Slave* (1901). It’s a slow burn, but the cumulative effect is intensely powerful: it’s Punchdrunk’s “best show in years”.

“It was time Punchdrunk took a new turning, and they have,” said Susannah Clapp in *The Observer*. The use of sound in this production is shiveringly brilliant, as is the lighting – whether it’s the “soft overhead radiance from dangling cotton-wool puffballs”, a “scatter of red fairy bulbs around a girl’s looking glass”, or a “golden glow” that offers a glimpse of shadowy waltzing couples. This is a sophisticated, and “often exquisite”, piece of theatre.



An immersive, barefoot experience for attendees

I found it “underwhelming” said Nick Curtis in the *Evening Standard*. I missed the “epic scope” and the “thronging” human crowds of Punchdrunk’s big shows. In those, you felt as though “you were walking unseen through a society of ghosts. Here, you feel you’re being shown set designs for the netherworld they might inhabit.” That the story is somewhat insubstantial does not help, said Clive Davis in *The Times*. Bonham Carter’s voice “hints at menace, but the meandering tale, like the production itself, is more

a tasteful but loosely assembled collection of other-worldly imagery” than a spine chiller. Punchdrunk are “masters of visual muzak”, and what we have here is like a “ghost train for hipsters”, only without a train.

The week’s other opening

A View From The Bridge Theatre Royal Haymarket, London SW1 (020-7930 8800). Until 3 August

Transferring from Bath, this is a slightly “old-fashioned” production of Arthur Miller’s Brooklyn-set play, simply staged in period 1950s costume. But it is as “searing” as ever, and Dominic West is “superb” as Eddie Carbone (*Financial Times*).

Albums of the week: three new releases

Elgar: Symphony No. 1 & Symphony No. 2 (The Hallé Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder)
Hyperion
£20



Sir Mark Elder is leaving his role as musical director of The Hallé Orchestra after a quarter of a century, said Ivan Hewett in *The Daily Telegraph*. The great conductor had arrived with big plans for the Manchester institution, which was then somewhat down on its luck: “I simply wanted to make the Hallé the greatest orchestra in the world for British music,” he explained last month. His strategy of taking it back to its roots – to Elgar and Vaughan Williams – “paid off handsomely”; and he can be proud that he is bequeathing the orchestra to his successor, Kahchun Wong, in “fine shape”.

Elgar’s two symphonies were first recorded by the Hallé under Elder 20 years ago, said Andrew Clements in *The Guardian*. This superb new recording features more recent performances of the works, with more warmth and refinement. Thanks to Elder’s “faultless grasp of the symphonic architecture” – his sense of “where to allow the music to breathe and where to push it forward” – these versions are “overwhelmingly convincing”, and “as fine as any currently available on disc”.

Richard Hawley: In This City They Call You Love
BMG
£11



During his two-decade-long solo career (which followed stints with the Longpigs and Pulp), Richard Hawley has “crafted full-bodied baroque-pop that operates in dualling ultimatums: hope or despair, freedom or solitude”, said Sophie Williams in *NME*. His terrific ninth album is made up of songs that are infused with “aching beauty”, and offer – in Hawley’s familiar but singular style – “vivid odes” to the characters, architecture and quirks of his home city, Sheffield.

This is Hawley’s best album since his 2005 masterpiece *Coles Corner*, said Will Hodgkinson in *The Times*. It leans “deep into the lush balladry and spartan rockabilly that has always been close to his heart”. One track, *People*, evokes “deep sentiment from nothing more than a simple guitar line, a beat, and poetic visions of factory life”. *Deep Space* is an Elvis Presley-style song that combines a “plea for solitude with a critique of interstellar adventures by billionaires in the face of environmental catastrophe”. And *Heavy Rain* is a “string-laden love ballad for the end times”.

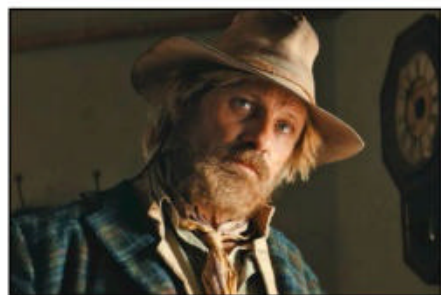
Charli XCX: Brat
Atlantic
£11



Now 31, the British pop star and songwriter Charli XCX (aka “savvy Essex girl” Charlotte Aitchison) has been making edgy electro-pop since she was 14, said Helen Brown in *The Independent*. She’s had a chart-topping album (2022’s “glitchy pop-punk outing” *Crash*), and a string of “banging” Top 10 singles, and she has knocked out hits for other pop acts and artists including Iggy Azalea, Iona Pop, Shawn Mendes and Camila Cabello. This new collection looks set to take that success even further: it’s a “bold, blunt, challenging and vulnerable” collection, which mixes hedonism with “clever, anarchic beats”.

This is a “confessional LP that never loses its energy” and brims “with euphoric club offerings”, said Brittany Spanos in *Rolling Stone*. Charli XCX records are always filled with bangers, but on this sixth album she “stays out later and goes harder than ever before”. And while she’s “spinning around on the dance floor, she’s also spiralling out in her head, digging deep into the types of insecurities and fears reserved for the comedown the morning after”.

Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don’t miss; 1 star=don’t bother)



The Dead Don't Hurt

2hrs 9mins (15)

Western directed by and starring Viggo Mortensen

★★★★

Viggo Mortensen doesn't just star in this "sinewy, sombre, handsomely crafted" western. He is also its director, its writer and the composer of its score, said Peter Bradshaw in *The Guardian*. "With almost anyone else", the result might be a self-indulgent disaster, but Mortensen has a "self-effacing and even reticent quality" on screen that "works against that danger". He plays Holger Olsen, a Danish immigrant in 1860s America who lives in a cabin he built himself near a frontier town in Nevada. One day, during a visit to San Francisco, he meets "the frank, unabashed gaze" of Vivienne (Vicky Krieps), a French-Canadian flower seller. The pair become a couple; but when Olsen decides to join the Union army and goes off to fight the civil war, Vivienne is left to fend off the attentions of a predatory local official. The world the film evokes is one of "cynicism, brutality and bad faith", but the love between Olsen and Vivienne "blooms like a miraculous flower"; and Krieps and Mortensen's "rapport is just right: romantic, besotted with each other, and yet tough and without illusion".

Krieps (who was so good in 2017's *Phantom Thread*) reminds us what a "talented and beguiling actress she is", said Brian Viner in the *Daily Mail*. And even if the way the story shifts back and forth in time is a bit befuddling, this is a strong piece of cinema. Some may find that the film takes a slow and "circuitous route to get to the killing we know is coming", said Alistair Harkness in *The Scotsman*. But this non-linear plotting enables Mortensen "to put an intriguing female perspective on a traditionally masculine genre", in a film that teases out "a truer sense of the complexities involved in trying to make a go of life on the frontier than we're used to seeing in westerns".



Bad Boys: Ride or Die

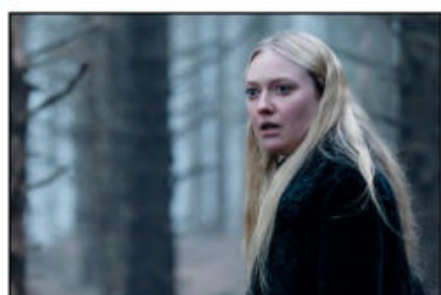
1hr 55mins (15)

Will Smith in what could prove his comeback movie

★★★

When Will Smith jumped onto the stage at the 2022 Oscars and slapped presenter Chris Rock in the face, "it looked as if his career could well be over", said Matthew Bond in *The Mail on Sunday*. "Since the incident, he's only had one film released, the already completed slave drama *Emancipation*." As a result, much now hangs on *Bad Boys: Ride or Die*, the fourth film in the long-running cop-buddy franchise in which he co-stars with Martin Lawrence. Smith "badly needs it to be good". And actually, it's not at all bad. It won't win awards, but it's the kind of film "that commercial cinema used to be all about". This time round, "our increasingly less than dynamic" duo are called upon to clear the name of their beloved former boss (Joe Pantoliano), who was killed in the last film and is now facing posthumous accusations of corruption. The film is "glossy, flashy and thoroughly entertaining"; and Smith manages to be "vulnerable, likeable and charismatic. In other words, just what he needed" to be. Will it be enough to resurrect his career? "We'll have to wait and see."

I'm afraid it didn't win me over, said Johnny Oleksinski in the *New York Post*. Lawrence is "as boisterously silly as ever", but Smith looks "dead behind the eyes", and the plot is entirely formulaic. The film "delivers on the key basic requirements for popcorn escapism", said Wendy Ide in *The Observer*: it is directed with "brash flamboyance", with lots of exploding vehicles, sweeping drone shots of "shimmering, sinful Miami", and slo-mo clips of "bikini-clad babes playing beach volleyball". But if "the bullets mainly find their targets, the jokes do not"; and "the comic chemistry between Smith and Lawrence" has started to feel decidedly "laboured and stale".



The Watched

1hr 42mins (15)

Muddled horror film set in an "Oirish" forest

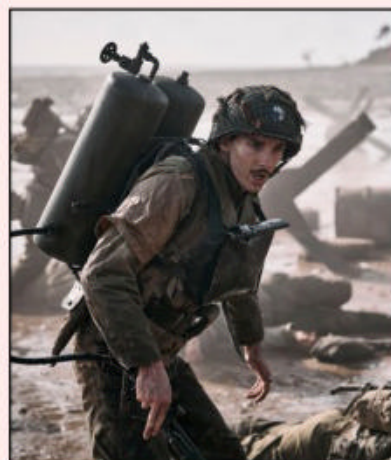
★★

The film career of M. Night Shyamalan might be described as a "plummet from the explosive opening heights of early mega hits such as *The Sixth Sense*" down into "the sad and sludgy ineptitude" of "gimmicky dirges" such as *The Happening*, said Kevin Maher in *The Times*. Now his 24-year-old daughter, Ishana Night Shyamalan, has made her first feature film, and it could be said that the "'nepo baby' director has bravely saved everyone a lot of time and energy by skipping straight to the gimmicky dirge career phase." A horror film, *The Watched* stars Dakota Fanning as an artist working in a pet shop in Galway who, while transporting a parrot to Belfast, "gets lost in an ancient magical Oirish diddle-de-diddle-de-eye forest". There, she seeks refuge in a cabin that is visited every night by hostile creatures. The film's not all terrible: "some of the scenes demonstrate that Shyamalan has a flair for, well, framing and lighting". But it's "so incoherent, so muddled and so intellectually half-baked that you'd have to wonder exactly why, in such an economically challenging filmmaking environment, it was green-lit in the first place. On second thoughts..."

"Shyamalan *fille* does show promise," said Tim Robey in *The Daily Telegraph*: her film is "handsomely shot", and the creepy beasties "make an impact". But "the pacing's a trudge", and the final twists "land with a wet slap". Matters aren't helped by Fanning's "flat" performance, said Benjamin Lee in *The Guardian*. "Underacting to the point of barely turning up", she listlessly recites "perfunctory dialogue as if she'd rather be anywhere else". By the end, "we can empathise".

D-Day: The Unheard Tapes – an immersive BBC documentary

To commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day, the BBC has been showing Mark Radice's superb three-part documentary *D-Day: The Unheard Tapes*, said Barbara Ellen in *The Observer*. In a technique previously employed for 2022's *Aids: The Unheard Tapes*, it features actors who lip sync the recorded testimony, gathered from archives around the world, of some of the thousands of people involved in the landings, and the fighting that raged afterwards. We hear, of course, the voices of British and American veterans, but also those of local people, French Resistance fighters and German veterans. It is phenomenally effective. You feel "you're there with the soldiers", trying, under heavy gunfire, to make it over the "blood-splattered beaches".



"Sombre, vital, masterful"

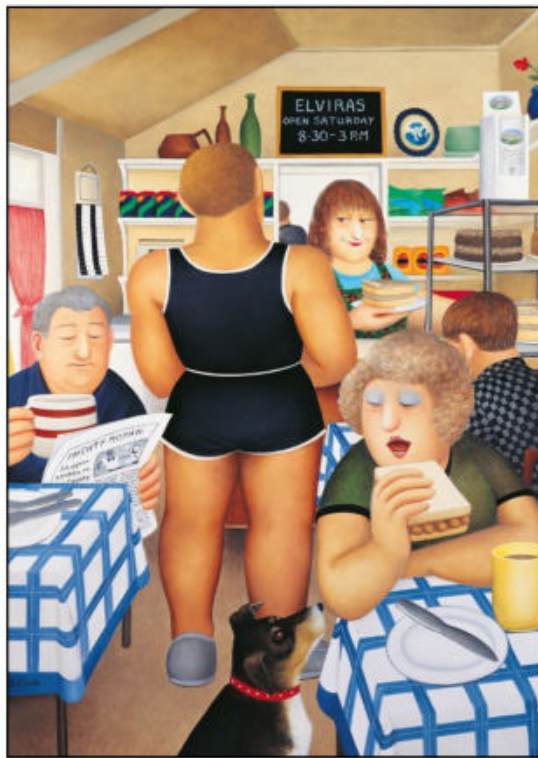
This is a "sombre, vital, masterful retelling" in which "the immediacy is jolting", and "the emotional access intimate", said Jasper Rees in *The Daily Telegraph*. It helps, too, that the cast is "outstanding", able to hint at trauma with just "the tweak of an ear or the widening of an eye". It is "stunning television – stunningly simple, too", agreed Aidan Smith in *The Scotsman*. And it is full of "diamond quotes". In one memorable segment, Private Harry Parley, of the US army's 29th Infantry Division, describes the moment he became one of the first troops to land off Omaha Beach, on 6 June 1944. "You didn't know where you were, what to do," he recalls. "The ramp went down, your asshole puckered up. You took a deep breath and you started to pray."

Exhibition of the week **Beryl Cook / Tom of Finland**

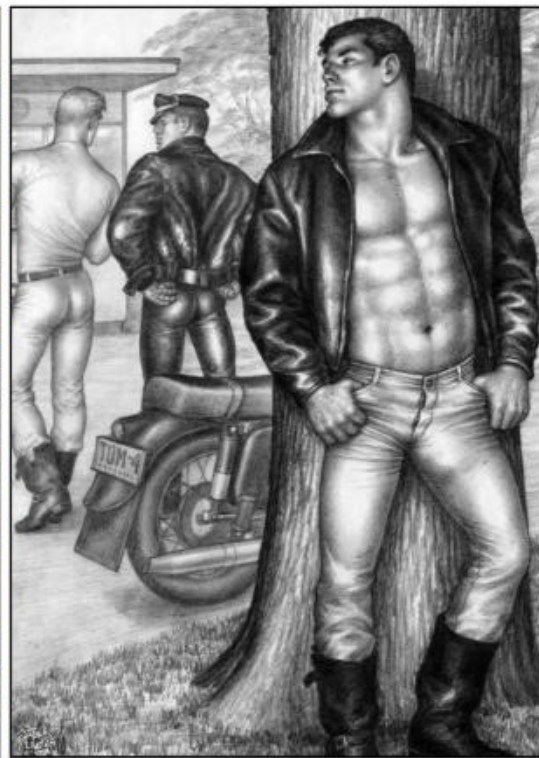
Studio Voltaire, London SW4 (020-7622 1294, studiovoltaire.org). Until 25 August. Free entry

At first glance, Beryl Cook (1926-2008) and Tom of Finland (1920-1991) might seem “like an odd pairing for an exhibition”, said Osman Can Yerebakan in *AnOther Magazine*. The former was a hobby painter from Plymouth whose jolly depictions of “voluptuous small-town ladies” became extremely popular in Britain in the 1970s and 1980s; the latter, a gay Finnish emigrant to America who fetishised biker culture and created “euphoric” black-and-white fantasies of “sexual encounters between leather-clad hunks”. Nevertheless, this show insists that the two shared more than a roughly contemporaneous lifespan: both artists, the exhibition’s curators point out, focused on curvy bodies and extravagant outfits; both examine unfiltered desires, if in very different ways. While Tom of Finland was explicit with his sexuality, Cook hid hers behind “tongue-in-cheek depictions of everyday life”. The result is a small but fascinating display that generates an “unlikely synergy”.

Tom of Finland – born Touko Valio Laaksonen – “pushes macho musculature and hyper-male bravado to an erotic extreme”, said Eddy Frankel in *Time Out*. The “leather-clad bikers” he draws in his distinctive style “bulge and ripple”, his focus somehow always on their crotches. It’s an idiosyncratic vision of “idealised masculinity”. Beryl Cook, meanwhile, provides a display of “everyday British bawdiness”, perfectly capturing



Beryl Cook's *Elvira's Café* (1997) and Tom of Finland's *Untitled* (1964)



the Saturday-night atmosphere of her hometown, Plymouth: the women in her pictures are “big and buxom”, the men much the same. There are “big ladies dressed as maids” parading outside nightclubs, and women laughing at male strippers. “Both artists are brilliant in their own way” – but showing them together dilutes the uniqueness of their work. Really, this “could and should have been two separate solo exhibitions”.

Perhaps so, said Adrian Searle in *The Guardian*. Yet both artists “say

something about the social mores of the very different worlds they inhabited”. Cook was “an enduring fixture” in a working-class British culture far removed from the sophisticated art world, most at home in pubs and greasy spoons – though she also painted, for instance, a Marseille sex worker walking her dogs, and a pair of “fur-coated lesbian ladies off for a martini” in New York. Tom, meanwhile, not only documented the underground gay world he lived in, but did much to “shape that culture’s codes, its look and behaviour” with his hyper-masculine construction workers, lumberjacks, cops and prisoners. Both created art that was non-judgemental and packed with incidental detail. Both, in their own ways, “wanted to give pleasure”, and neither had time for “moral hypocrisy” – Cook, it’s worth noting, was a long-standing “gay ally”. This is a small show, but “I wouldn’t want more” – it’s fitting for a pair of artists who are “minor but good fun”.

Where to buy...

The Week reviews an exhibition in a private gallery

Boscoe Holder / Geoffrey Holder

at Victoria Miro

Born in Trinidad, the Holder brothers were the Zelig of the postwar world. Boscoe, the elder, somehow survived a life of great bohemian excess in London, working as an after-hours piano player in venues including the Colony Room, mixing with the likes of Freud, Bacon and the Krays. Geoffrey, meanwhile, followed a rather more lucrative career in the US, directing the Broadway musical *The Wiz* and starring in *Live and Let Die*. In truth, the brothers would be better served by a biography – or indeed a biopic – than by an art exhibition. But both did paint, sometimes well. Geoffrey, whose psychedelic mannerist pictures are the thrill here – was rather better than his



Geoffrey's *Woman on Man's Shoulders*, detail

brother. Yet Boscoe’s male nudes are far from terrible. Really, this show is mainly interesting on account of its subjects’ biographies – but works such as Geoffrey’s *Possible Self-Portrait* are genuinely excellent in their own right. Prices on request.

16 Wharf Road, London N1
(020-7336 8109). Until 27 July

Monet and the political vandals

One of Claude Monet’s best-known works, *Coquelicots* (*Poppies*, 1873), was defaced by a climate activist on 1 June. The stunt was



carried out by a member of *Riposte Alimentaire* (Food Response), a group of activists concerned with food production. The activist, wearing a T-shirt bearing the word “L’Enfer” (hell), stuck an image of a barren landscape on the painting – designed, said the group, as “a nightmarish version of the same painting, representing a field of poppies in 2100”. *Coquelicots* has since been cleaned and re-hung, undamaged. The French culture minister, Rachida Dati, called for a new “penal policy” on such acts, saying: “This destruction of art by delinquents cannot be justified in any way. It must stop!” The activist will appear before a court in July. Additionally, a Luxembourg-born artist has been charged, after she daubed the words “Me Too” on *L’Origine du monde* (*The Origin of the World*, 1866) – a full-frontal female nude by Gustave Courbet, in Metz earlier this year.



Best books... Reverend Richard Coles

The writer and broadcaster's latest novel, *Murder at the Monastery* (W&N £22), is just out. He is an ambassador for Independent Bookshop Week (15-22 June; booksaremybag.com), the annual celebration of indie bookshops

The Changeling by Robin Jenkins, 1960 (Canongate £9.99). A heartbreaking novel by one of Scotland's finest writers, weirdly little known outside his own country. In the 1950s, Jenkins was a schoolteacher in Glasgow, like this novel's unlikeable protagonist, who decides to conduct an experiment in moral improvement with a boy from the tenements.

Babette's Feast and Other Stories by Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen, 1958 (Penguin £9.99). A Danish aristocrat born in the 1880s, Karen Blixen wrote under different names – Isak Dinesen being the best known to English readers – and she lived for a while in Kenya.

Her experiences there are recalled in her best-known book, *Out of Africa*. Her short stories are wonderful, such as *Babette's Feast* – about what generosity means in practice rather than in theory.

Bertie: A Life Of Edward VII by Jane Ridley, 2012 (Vintage £18.99). Jane Ridley's life of Lutyens was superb, but I enjoyed her life of Victoria's son and successor even more. She is a clear-sighted but humane explorer of the distant and not so distant lives of others, and loves to throw in the odd detail that seems almost too good to be true.

A Month In The Country by J.L. Carr, 1980 (Penguin

£9.99). Small, but perfectly formed – the masterpiece, I think, of the most distinguished writer to come from Kettering (not a lot of competition). Set in Yorkshire after the First World War, it is the beautiful and gently melancholic story of a veteran working on the restoration of a medieval wall painting in a village church.

French Provincial Cooking by Elizabeth David, 1960 (Grub Street £12.99). Not only a source of terrific recipes – try the pot-roasted chicken with olives – which she bestowed on grey, rationed England like sunshine after relentless rain, but for my money the finest writer of English prose of her generation.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

Playwright Gareth Farr brings to the stage the little-known story of three pioneers of IVF, the hostility they faced and the bravery of their early volunteers, in **A Child of Science**. Until 6 July, Bristol Old Vic, Bristol (bristololdvic.org.uk).

In Suffolk, **The Aldeburgh Festival** is in full swing for another week, with performances by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and of Schubert's *Winterreise*. Until 23 June, Britten Pears Arts, Snape Maltings, Suffolk (brittenpearsarts.org).

Yoshida: Three Generations of Japanese Printmaking brings together the works of a Japanese artistic dynasty from the late 1800s to the present, culminating in a site-specific installation of cherry blossom. Until 3 November, Dulwich Picture Gallery, London SE21 (dulwichpicturegallery.org.uk).

Book now

The Idler, the magazine dedicated to the pleasures and principles of loafing, hosts its annual **Idler Festival**. There will be talks by



Yoshida Hiroshi's *Kumoi Cherry Trees* (1926)

Zadie Smith, Rowan Williams and Olivia Laing, walks and workshops. 5-7 July, Fenton House, Hampstead, London NW3 (idler.co.uk).

Book early for a new West End production of **Waiting for Godot** – the first since 2009 – with Ben Whishaw and Lucian Msamati playing Samuel Beckett's two eternally loitering tramps, Estragon and Vladimir. 13 September-14 December, Theatre Royal Haymarket, London SW1 (trh.co.uk).

Television

Programmes

Lost Boys & Fairies

Concluding episode of the "sad, beautiful" drama about a gay couple trying to adopt (Guardian). Mon 17 Jun, BBC1 21:00 (60mins); catch up on earlier episodes on iPlayer.

Storyville: Flee A powerful – and mostly animated – documentary, telling the story of a gay Afghan man, Amin, and his attempts to flee persecution at home. Tue 18 Jun, BBC4 22:00 (85mins).

The Stormtrooper Scandal

Two-part investigation into Ben Moore and his *Art Wars* NFT project, a "get-rich-quick" scheme in which investors were persuaded to buy digital images of *Star Wars* stormtrooper helmets. Thur 20 Jun, BBC2 21:00 (90mins).

Talking Doctor Who As part of the show's 60th anniversary celebrations, David Tennant delves into the archives to explore the first incarnations of the Time Lord. Thur 20 Jun, BBC4 21:15 (60mins).

Films

A Man for All Seasons

(1966) Paul Scofield leads an all-star cast in the multi-Oscar-winning film version of Robert Bolt's play, about the conflict between Sir Thomas More and Henry VIII. Sat 15 Jun, BBC2 13:55 (115mins).

The Duke (2020) Director Roger Michell's swansong tells the unlikely true story of the taxi driver (Jim Broadbent) who stole a portrait from the National Gallery. Sun 16 Jun, BBC2 21:00 (90mins).

Bonnie and Clyde

(1967) Warren Beatty and Faye Dunaway star as the bandits who went on a crime spree in Depression-era America. Sun 16 Jun, BBC2 22:30 (105mins).

Coming up for auction

There's a rare chance to see George Stubbs's monumental **Mares and Foals in a River Landscape** as it goes on public display – for only the second time in its history – prior to a sale at Christie's. Painted in the 1760s, it is expected to fetch £7m-£10m. On display from 28 June-1 July; auction 2 July, Christie's, 8 King Street, London SW1 (christies.com).

The Archers: what happened last week

Lynda writes a play for the D-Day event based on Fallon's aunt's love letters and, forgetting their history, asks Ben and Chelsea to perform. At the abattoir, Jason confesses to stealing the meat – Vince fires him, but Freddie feels bad. Fallon makes a fuss of Harrison on his birthday and they tenderly make up. At the Stables, Jakob diagnoses Oliver's horse Duke with strangles; Lilian can't find crucial paperwork and worries that Alice was drinking at work. Joy and Mick make up; she tells him there are things she can't talk about. George confesses to Emma that he's had enough of the heroism chat; as Emma and Ed disparage Alice, a guilty George tries to defend her. On another stakeout, Vince and Freddie discover that Markie, Kenton's attacker, is behind the thefts. Lynda's D-Day play is a success and Chelsea says performing it with Ben has been good for them. Harrison shares the good news with Kenton that Markie has been arrested and should go to jail. Oliver is cool with Lilian over the situation at the Stables; Jakob can't guarantee that Duke will survive.

Houses for sailing enthusiasts



▲ **Devon:** Thalassa, East Portlemouth. Boasting direct access to the beach, this detached property includes a boathouse and three private moorings. Main suite, 5 further beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, living/dining room, snug, boathouse, garden, garage. £5.95m; Strutt & Parker (01548-897616).



◀ **Devon:** Little Ravenswell, Kingswear. A handsome waterfront property (seen here bottom middle) set on the banks of the River Dart, with a running mooring (subject to a DHNA licence) attached to the sea wall. 4 suites, family room, kitchen, living/dining room, garage. £3.45m; Savills (01392-455733).



▲ **Cornwall:** Station Road, Fowey. A former 18th century inn with mooring rights on the River Fowey and decks on two levels. 4 beds, family bath, shower, kitchen, dining room, 1 further recep, study. £1m; Fine & Country (01208-76800).





◀ **Pembrokeshire:** Eaton Hall, Dale. Grand Grade II house on the harbour (third from the right). The property was built in 1900, offers wonderful views over the estuary and is close to the Dale Yacht Club. 6 beds, family bath, kitchen, 3 receps, patio, garden. £1m; Country Living Group (01437-616101).

▼ **Isle of Wight:** Inglewood, St Lawrence. An elegant house built in 1887 in a commanding position with far-reaching views over the coastline to the English Channel. Near the Shanklin Sailing Club, which runs an annual race to Ventnor. Master suite, 2 further beds, 4 beds, family bath, kitchen, 4 receps, garden, parking. £2.15m; Spence Willard (01983-200880).



◀ **Oxfordshire:** Marsh Mills Boathouse, Henley-on-Thames. This delightful property has a boathouse and mooring on the River Thames. 3 beds (2 en suite), shower, kitchen, 3 receps, self-contained 1-bed cottage, 1-bed annexe, garage. OIEO £4.5m; Knight Frank (01491-844901).



◀ **Argyll and Bute:** Sanda Island. A private island with a helipad and two slipways, the islands of Sheep and Glunimore are also included in the sale. Seven properties, with accommodation for 26 people. OIEO £2.5m; Knight Frank (01312-229608).

▶ **Isle of Wight:** The Cottage, Cowes. Overlooking Cowes Harbour, this house has a 14-metre private pontoon and mooring. 4 beds, 3 baths, kitchen/dining/living room, terrace. £1.65m; Spence Willard (01983-200880).



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Home-made elderflower cordial

My grandmother was an inveterate forager, says Alice Lascelles in the FT, and in the summer, her kitchen would be filled with “wonky bottles of elderflower cordial”. These days you can pick it up at the supermarket, but I am convinced that it is “always better home-made”. The time to gather the elder’s “lacy white clusters of flowers” is May and June, when hedgerows and parks are filled with their “citrusy, honeyed, slightly musky-rose perfume”. Pick the heads on a dry day, preferably early in the morning, and use them as soon as possible, having first given them a gentle shake to dislodge any insects (don’t wash them: it diminishes the flavour). Making cordial is then essentially a case of steeping the flowers in sugar syrup, although opinion differs as to what sugar-water ratio is best (more sugar results in a more shelf-stable cordial). Food writer Angela Clutton suggests using 500g of caster sugar and 850ml of water per 15 heads of elderflower. Put the water in a big pot with the flesh of two lemons, bring to the boil and then add the sugar and 30g of citric acid (which acts as a preservative), and stir. Take off the boil, push in the elderflowers until fully immersed, then cover and leave to steep for 24 hours. Fine-strain and bottle, and store in the fridge.

The rise of gourmet flavoured oils

Until recently, said Bee Wilson in The Wall Street Journal, “the reputation of oils with added flavours was mixed at best”. Many



“Lacy white clusters” of elderflower

of us will have experience of flavoured oils going rancid at the back of a cupboard. And the prejudice against them has been further intensified by the overuse of truffle oil, which often tastes “nothing like fresh truffle”. Now, however, “clever modern chefs” have begun creating their own flavoured oils, which they’re putting to ingenious use in their cooking. Sometimes, the flavours border on weird: shrimp claws, pine needles, pomelo skin, even coffee. Yet at their best, these oils give access to flavours that would be “tricky to create through cooking alone”. And, at the molecular level, they’re a “smart move” too, because molecules that activate our sense of smell (which we use to detect

complex flavours) are easier to extract with oil than with water. Used intelligently, a flavoured oil can transform a dish. Take the sorrel soup I recently ate at Castle Farm restaurant, near Bath. The soup – creamy and smooth like a warm vichyssoise – was excellent on its own, but it was lifted to a “whole other level” by the “pool of emerald green sorrel oil” in the bottom of the bowl. The dark-green oil “marbled with the pale green soup” as soon as we took our first spoonful, “making it taste like spring in a bowl”.

A boom in supermarket “fakeaways”

Ten years ago, barely any major restaurant chains sold branded products in supermarkets, said Andrew Ellson in The Times. Now, most do, and they are proving very popular. At Ocado, the online supermarket, sales of products from the likes of Franco Manca, Gourmet Burger Kitchen and Itsu have “soared by more than 50% over the past year”. And Ocado reports that most are delivered at the end of the week, suggesting that households are using them as a cheaper alternative to a conventional takeaway on a Friday or Saturday night. A Franco Manca spicy salami and dried onion pizza costs £5.75 at Ocado; ordered from a restaurant kitchen via Deliveroo, it costs more than £14. While few would suggest that these “fakeaways” are as tasty as their restaurant equivalents, they still feel like a treat, making them very appealing for those on a tighter budget.

Recipe of the week: grilled prawns with garam masala butter

This combination of garlicky garam masala butter and hot grilled prawns is a winner, says Genevieve Taylor. When grilling unpeeled prawns, I always “butterfly” them by scoring the shell. To do this, rest a prawn on a board with the back facing your dominant cutting hand. Press firmly down with your other hand to tension the body and, using a sharp knife, slice through the shell a few millimetres into the flesh. Once all the prawns are scored, use a finger to wipe out the vein running just inside the cut.

Serves 2-4, depending on greed

*1kg large, raw shell-on prawns 1 tbsp flaked sea salt For the garam masala butter: 2 tbsp coriander seeds 1 tbsp cumin seeds
2cm piece of cinnamon stick, crumbled 1 tsp black peppercorns 10 cardamom pods 5 cloves 125g butter 2 garlic cloves, crushed*

For the garnish: a little chopped coriander sliced red chilli

- Fire up the barbecue until it is ready for hot direct grilling.
- Tip the coriander and cumin seeds, cinnamon, peppercorns, cardamom and cloves into a flameproof frying pan (one that is generous enough to fit the prawns) and set over the fire to toast for a couple of minutes. Tip the lot into a spice mill or pestle and mortar and grind to a powder.
- Set the pan back over the fire and drop in the butter, allowing it to melt. Once melted, slide the pan off the heat and add the garlic and garam masala, stirring together to combine. Leave to one side to keep warm while you grill the prawns.
- I always cook smaller things like prawns on



a grill tray as you can essentially stir-fry them, tossing them about a bit, which is way easier than individually turning each prawn. If you don’t have one, it’s fine – it’s just a little more of a fiddle with the tongs.

- Make sure the barbecue is really hot – take the lid off to allow for maximum oxygen flow. Spread the prawns out over the fire, either on a grill tray or directly on the grill bars, and sprinkle over the salt. Cook for a couple of minutes before turning and cooking for another minute or two – they are done when they are pink all over.
- Scoop up and add to the pan of spiced butter, tossing to coat. Sprinkle with coriander and chilli and serve straight away.

*Taken from Scorched: the Ultimate Guide to Barbecuing Fish by Genevieve Taylor, published by Quadrille at £25.
To buy from The Week Bookshop for £19.99, call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.*

New cars: what the critics say



Mazda MX-5

Price: from £28,015

The Daily Telegraph

Mazda hasn't changed much on the MX-5, maybe because "it didn't need to". There's still just a 1.5- and 2.0-litre engine to choose from, but the throttle and steering have been tweaked to make it more responsive and there's better traction control; it also has new headlights and a new infotainment system. "A joy to drive", affordable to buy and run, this "reliable" two-seater sports car is "better than ever".

Top Gear Magazine

The convertible MX-5 has a winning formula honed over decades, and is a welcome "antidote to the anaesthetised, overly assisted" drive of modern cars. The gearbox is "a hoot", but the MX-5 is built for pleasure not speed; lightweight and agile, "it's still a riot to rev" in this new version. You can choose between a soft-top or a retractable fastback, which has a folding metal roof.

What Car?

The 130bhp 1.5-litre MX-5 can do 0-62mph in a "tame" 8.3 secs, while the livelier 2.0-litre has "more mid-range punch" – and, with 181bhp, can do 0-62mph in 6.5 secs. The interior is "smart" but "snug" – taller drivers will struggle with leg- and headroom, and storage space is limited. The dashboard is easy to use: there's a smart 8.8-inch touchscreen with a rotary dial and shortcut buttons.

The best... unusual camping gear

▼ **Luminoodle LED Rope Lights** Light up your area, and stop tent ropes becoming a trip hazard, by festooning them with these waterproof 180-lumens LED rope lights. Alternatively, you can coil the lights together in their carry bag to create a lantern. Available in 5ft or 10ft lengths (from £18; amazon.co.uk).



► BioLite FirePit+

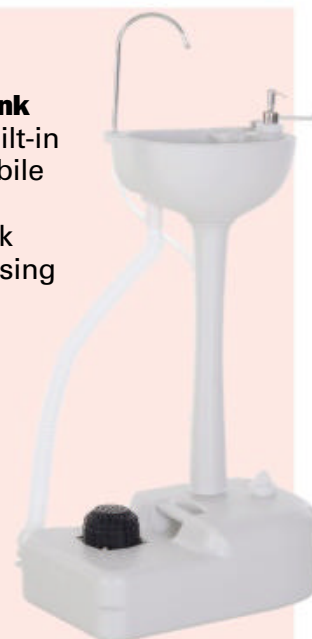
A portable outdoor grill that uses a patented airflow system with 51 inbuilt jets to give better combustion and smoke-free flames. The fan will power the fire for up to 30 hours on a single charge, and it can be controlled via Bluetooth (£210; shop.rnli.org).



▲ Vanilla Leisure Vesuvius Outdoor Heated Chair

This clever folding chair has a heated seat and backrest, and an insulated cup-holder. Plug it into a portable power bank, and choose from three temperature settings (£80; vanillaleisure.co.uk).

► **Outsunny Portable Camping Sink** Lightweight and sturdy, with a built-in carry handle and wheels, this mobile basin can be moved around even when it is filled with water. Its tank holds 17 litres. You fill the basin using a foot pump, and it has a flexible drainage hose to divert the waste water away. It also has a soap dispenser and a towel holder (£58; robertdyas.co.uk).



◀ Yeti Roadie 24 Cool Box

This robust insulated cooler is tall enough to chill a bottle of wine upright, but slim enough to fit in a car footwell. It weighs 5.8kg and is available in various colours. Add a cushion and you can use it as a seat (£200; uk.yeti.com).



Tips... how to clean your car like a pro

Valeting professional Mark Elliott, of Ness Car Care, offers his tricks of the trade:

- Wash cars with a pH-neutral shampoo with no wax additive. Rinse with water and dry the car before polishing. If a car is left outside all the time, use a polish or wax on it at least once a year.
- Never leave bird lime on a car. While it is still fresh, use a microfibre cloth and warm water to gently wipe it away.
- If you have chrome, do not leave it to degrade, as it will cost a lot to rechrome. It is easy to look after – wash and dry it, then add a good layer of quality polish.
- A wet chamois leather is best for cleaning glass; dry it with a microfibre cloth.
- For leather seats, use a good-quality leather cleaner followed by a protective balm. Fabric seats can be treated with a fabric cleaner and sprayed with Scotchgard protection once dry.
- If you are looking for a natural finish on your tyres, avoid silicon in cleaning products, as this will make them shiny.

SOURCE: THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

And for those who have everything...



With more than 50 years' experience, Mark Norman of Edelweiss, in Cambridge, creates bespoke pianos with a focus on British manufacturing. The new S132 Silex edition small grand piano is made entirely in the UK, except for the action mechanism. **£455,000; edelweisspianos.com**

SOURCE: FINANCIAL TIMES

Where to find... new UK camping and glampsites

Wild With Consent gets special access from landowners. New to their books is a field backing onto woods by the 14th century **Preston Tower** in Northumberland (£45 for a camper van; wildwithconsent.com).

The new **Isle of Gigha** site has 17 pitches for tents and ten for camper vans. It has a wilderness feel and communal fire pit (from £15; gighacampsite.co.uk).

Coppet Hill, a dairy farm and campsite near Bridport, Dorset, has a new Pond Hideaway, a two-storey tent for families (sleeps four). The site has a sunflower maze in summer (from £95; coppethill.co.uk).

Gastro operator Woodfire Camping has a new site: **Chapel Field** on the Firle Estate, in the South Downs. Off-grid, there are pitches for tents and camper vans, plus five Touareg tents (from £21pp; woodfire.co.uk).

Himley Hall, in Staffordshire, has a new glampsite with quirky accommodation including domes from the first *Star Wars* film (from £160; himleyhallglamping.co.uk).

SOURCE: THE OBSERVER

A tourist's view of Saudi Arabia

Until 2019, visas to enter Saudi Arabia were largely restricted to pilgrims and expatriate workers, but the kingdom is now hoping to attract tourists as part of its effort to diversify its oil-dependent economy. Its dismal human-rights record might well put you off, says Lisa Grainger in *The Sunday Times*, but there have been some modest improvements. Amnesty International still reports arbitrary detentions, death sentences for rights advocates, and other horrors, but Riyadh's "mausoleum-like" Deera (or "Chop Chop") Square hasn't seen a public beheading since 2022, and women can now drive without a male chaperone.

As a Zimbabwean, I have "witnessed the negative effects of international isolation on a country", so I decided that I would visit. The visa form told me I must respect the country's "Islamic traditions" – which meant "covering up" and abstaining from alcohol – but I was allowed to wear a swimsuit at the pool, leave my head uncovered, and travel alone with a male Saudi guide.



The "unmissable" ancient site of Hegra

My trip started in Riyadh. It is a city of glitzy shopping malls and traffic jams, but the nearby mud-walled city of Diriyah is beautiful. Heavily restored since its listing as a Unesco World Heritage Site in 2010, its old centre, At-Turaif, is a "maze of old buildings and museums" that gets very lively in the evenings – "a bit like Covent Garden", but without the drunks. I was also impressed by the "subversive" art on display at the "polished" Diriyah Contemporary Art Biennale.

At the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, which is the site of Mohammed's tomb, pilgrims gather in diverse traditional attire, lending the scene a timeless quality. And the ancient site of Hegra is unmissable. The second-largest city of the first century Nabataean kingdom (after Jordan's Petra), it includes 131 "magnificent" rock-cut tombs, and there are some luxurious new hotels nearby, which are good bases for desert adventures including hiking, e-biking and air ballooning. For tour operators, try Wild Frontiers, Regent Travel, B Corp and Abercrombie & Kent.

Getting the flavour of...



A family-friendly retreat in rural Spain

Hotels don't come much more "family-friendly" than Caserio del Mirador, in southeast Spain, says Jenny Coad in *The Times*. Opened some 20 years ago by British expats Sarah and Johnny Robinson, this "unique rural stay" is the perfect place for small children, with a small play park, plenty of toys and lots of animals, including chickens, a Shetland pony and several rabbits. The six apartments have basic kitchens, which allow for "modest" self-catering, but Sarah also cooks "delicious" meals (including "children's tea" served at 5:30pm) for those who want them. The pool can be chilly, and some of the interiors "could do with a spruce-up", but the easy-going, friendly atmosphere compensates, and there's plenty to do nearby. Pleasant beaches and seaside towns such as Moraira lie half-an-hour's drive away, and there's lovely hiking to enjoy in the mountains around the hotel. *Seven nights self-catering for three costs from £1,277 (caseriodelmirador.com).*

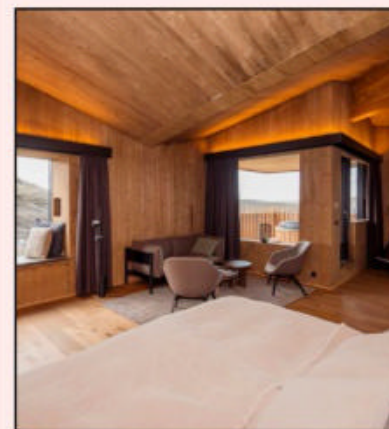
Big apes and bearcats in Borneo

The rainforests of Borneo are best known for their orangutans, but they're home to a vast range of other spectacular wildlife too, says Mike Unwin in *The Daily Telegraph*. A 12-night trip with Naturetrek begins with a long stay at the Deramakot Forest Reserve, in the Malaysian (rather than the Indonesian or Bruneian) part of the island. There's a pleasant lodge, with good guides who lead jungle expeditions by day and night. I saw two orangutans, plus elephant, slow loris (with their "huge saucer eyes"), binturong (also known as bearcats – not a bad description), and much more. Clouded leopard – the region's greatest feline star – proved elusive. The last three days of my tour were spent at the "gorgeous" Kinabatangan Wetland Resort, where the birdwatching on riverboat trips is "a dream". *From £4,695pp; naturetrek.co.uk.*

Paradise regained in Dorset

Thanks in part to a recent rewilding project, the Isle of Purbeck (pictured) is believed to be the most biodiverse corner of England, says David Bramwell in *The Guardian*. In 2020, several protected areas on this peninsula in Dorset were linked and expanded to form the UK's first "super" nature reserve, the 3,331-hectare Purbeck Heaths. Fences have been removed, allowing cattle, pigs and ponies to roam, with complex effects on the land that are helping smaller species to flourish. There are also plans to reintroduce beavers. It's a glorious landscape of heath, wetland, woodland, beaches and dunes, and wonderful for walking. The "crowning glory" is the RSPB reserve at Arne, where you can hear the "churring" of nightjars and might, on summer evenings, even spot one of these "prehistoric-looking" birds.

Hotel of the week



Highland Base Kerlingarfjöll, Iceland

This new "off-grid retreat" lies in the heart of Iceland, in a silent landscape of "snowdrift-blanketed peaks", glaciers and lava fields, says Stephanie Rafanelli in *Condé Nast Traveller*. Getting to it is "a mission", especially in winter, but for "adventure extremists" it's worth it for the activities on offer, which include cross-country skiing and hiking. The hotel, which looks like "a Nordic minimalist space station", has 28 rooms, six pod-like lodges, and some A-frame huts. There are geothermal baths, too – great for admiring the Northern Lights "after dinners of Arctic char and warming shots of Brennivin schnapps".

Doubles from £285; highlandbase.is.

Television doctor whose work changed thousands of lives

Michael Mosley
1957-2024

Michael Mosley, who has died in Greece aged 67, was one of Britain's "most recognisable TV doctors", said *The Times*, known for his cheerful willingness to use himself as a guinea pig in an effort to make scientific topics engaging and accessible. Although he said that his wife had vetoed "the idea of infesting myself with pubic lice", he consumed tapeworm eggs for the BBC documentary *Infested!*, ate a black pudding made with his own blood for *The Wonderful World of Blood*, and swallowed a camera for *Inside the Human Body*, giving viewers "a never-to-be-forgotten close-up of his inner workings". But, arguably, his most significant legacy was his popularisation of the 5:2 diet.

In 2012, Mosley had gone to his own doctor, thinking he might have a cancerous mole, and was instead diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, which is linked to excess weight. Declining drug treatments, he started to research the potential benefits of intermittent fasting. He found a scientific paper about the 5:2 diet – and persuaded the BBC to let him make a film about his efforts to cure himself of diabetes by following the diet, which involves eating normally on five days of the week, and consuming only 500-600 calories on the other two. By the end, he'd lost 9kg and his blood sugar levels were back to normal. The documentary was watched by three million people, and he followed it up with a book, *The Fast Diet*, co-written with the journalist Mimi Spencer, which sold 1.4 million copies. As the *New York Times* put it, this sent Britain into a "fasting frenzy". Everyone from the food writer Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall to the then Tory chancellor George Osborne were said to have managed to shed pounds by following the diet. But the book was not without its critics: other scientists noted that there were no studies showing that 5:2 led to long-term weight loss; the NHS highlighted "gaps in the evidence".



Mosley: popularised the 5:2 diet

Michael Mosley was born in Calcutta, the son of Bill, a banker working in Hong Kong, and his wife Joan. Sent back to England aged seven to go to boarding school, he read PPE at New College, Oxford. He started training as a banker but, after a couple of years, he decided that he was more interested in people than in money and enrolled in medical school, where he met his future wife, Clare, who became a GP and founded the website Parenting Matters. They would go on to have four children.

Mosley had planned to go into psychiatry, but after graduating, he became disillusioned by its limitations and, on a whim, responded to an advert he had seen for a trainee scheme at the BBC. His first full-length programme, *Horizon: Ulcer Wars*, examined the possibility, mooted by the Australian scientist Barry Marshall, that stomach ulcers were caused not by stress, but by the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*. Marshall was right, said *The Guardian*. He later shared

a Nobel Prize, while Mosley received 20,000 letters from people whose ulcers had been cured by antibiotics, and was named journalist of the year by the BMA. "I probably did, in a funny way, more good with that one programme than if I had stayed in medicine for 30 years," he reflected. In other documentaries, he looked into everything from cancer vaccines to the fate of those who died at Pompeii. More recently, he had made regular appearances on *The One Show*, and hosted a BBC podcast, *Just One Thing*, in which he dispensed health tips.

Mosley was on holiday on the Greek island of Symi last week when he went missing. On a searingly hot afternoon, he had left his wife on a beach and gone for a walk without his phone. It seems that while walking across the island to their hotel, he got lost, and that he then collapsed in the 40°C heat as he clambered down a rocky hillside towards a coastal resort.

The Chicago secretary who became "First Grandma"

Marian Robinson
1937-2024

Marian Robinson's great-grandmother was born into slavery; her father grew up in Jim Crow-era Alabama, where he was barred from whites-only restaurants and lavatories. But Robinson, who has died aged 86, raised her own family on the South Side of Chicago, and in 2008 she was sitting on a sofa with her son-in-law, Barack Obama, when he learnt that he had become America's first black president. Robinson had by then been widowed, and her daughter, Michelle, urged her to move to the White House with them. Initially, she refused, saying she wanted to stay in Chicago and couldn't sleep in a "museum". But she relented, in order to serve as "First Grandma" to the Obamas' two daughters. A stabilising, grounding influence, she rode with them to school each day in their motorcade; took them to playdates and piano lessons; and tucked them into bed when their parents were out. Having planned to stay for a few months, while the family settled in, she remained at the White House for eight years, living quietly in a small suite on the third floor. "The girls needed her," said the Obamas in a statement last week. "And she ended up being our rock through it all."

Marian Shields was born in Chicago in 1937. As a young woman, she fell in love with Fraser Robinson, who worked in a water plant (where he never missed a shift, even after he was diagnosed



Robinson: a "rock through it all"

with MS). They married in 1960 and moved into a small rented flat in the same building as her aunt, who was a piano teacher. Their son Craig was born in 1962; Michelle in 1964. Marian gave up her job as a secretary to raise the children and, though money was tight, Michelle recalled that her parents kept a tidy home and a nice car; took her and Craig on holidays; forced them to eat their greens; sent them to high-achieving schools; and expected them to go to college – confounding the view that "African-Americans primarily live in broken homes, that our families are somehow incapable of living out the same stable, middle-class dream as our white neighbours".

Marian taught Michelle to read before she went to nursery, and when she was in second grade, she insisted she be moved up a class; Michelle said this changed her life. Once, in her teens, she didn't tell her parents about a school trip to Paris, assuming they couldn't afford it. They were hurt when they found out. They'd never taken a foreign holiday, but they made sure she went. "We were their investment, me and Craig. Everything went into us." Both duly won places at Princeton. Yet when people gushed about their accomplishments, their mother would say: "They're not special at all. The South Side is filled with kids like that." In his book *A Promised Land*, Barack Obama described her as a "keeper of values", "a living, breathing reminder of who we were and where we came from".

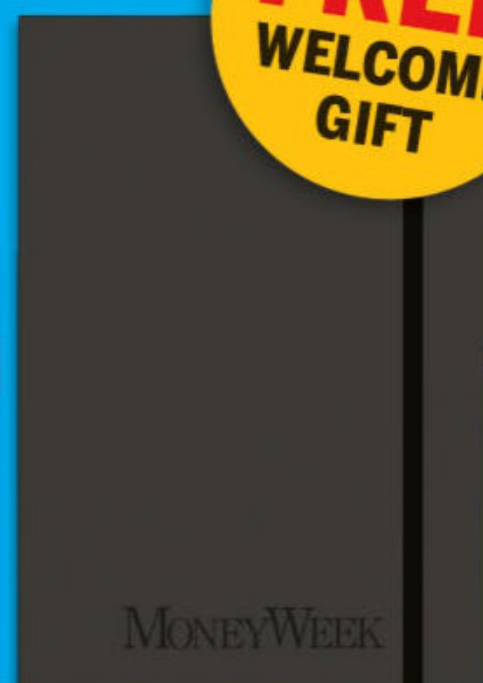
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Companies in the news ...and how they were assessed

Nvidia: rock-star confidence



Among its other laurels, Nvidia has long been a high scorer on recruiter Glassdoor's employee surveys – at the last count, 93% of staff said they would “recommend” the company to a friend. After last week's stock surge, which catapulted the US chipmaker into “the \$3trn market cap club”, those 30,000 employees have become a prized commodity, said Britney Nguyen on Quartz: the market values them at “more than \$100m dollars each”. Founder-CEO Jensen Huang, meanwhile, is enjoying rock-star

status. Sporting a \$9,000 Tom Ford biker jacket at last week's Computex tech conference in Taiwan, he was mobbed by fans and “even scrawled his name on a woman's top”, said Annabelle Liang on BBC Business. It was, in the words of local media, pure “Jensanity”. There seems to be no stopping Nvidia, which briefly rose to become the world's second-most valuable company after Microsoft (which later ceded first place to Apple), said Martin Strydom in The Times. Shares have powered up by 147% this year, after a storming 2023, as demand for AI ensures a voracious appetite for its chips. Last week, Nvidia revealed its latest suite of products, saying it was on an “accelerated road map” for new launches. “The next industrial revolution has begun,” said Huang. He's at the centre of it.

Apple: “AI for the rest of us”

Slower than rivals to jump on the AI bandwagon, Apple is trying to make up lost ground with the launch of “Apple Intelligence” – a suite of products and services that will weave the technology into core features of iPhones, iPads and Macs, said Mark Gurman on Bloomberg. The move includes a partnership with ChatGPT maker OpenAI, whose tech will be deployed in a smarter Siri voice assistant, among other uses. Apple is betting that “a personalised and understated approach to the technology will win over customers”. Updating an old Apple Mac slogan, it called Apple Intelligence “AI for the rest of us”. After revenue declines “in five of the past six quarters”, the pressure is on CEO Tim Cook “to show that the iPhone maker can lead again”. He probably didn't bargain on an intervention from Elon Musk, who immediately “threatened to ban Apple devices from his companies” if the OpenAI chatbot is integrated into Apple's iOS operating system, said DealBook in The New York Times. Musk claims the move would be an “unacceptable security violation”, said Matthew Field in The Daily Telegraph. But since he also has his own AI startup (xAI) and chatbot (Grok) – and is engaged in “a broader spat” with OpenAI boss Sam Altman – he may have ulterior motives.

Activists in London: pied pipers

The London Stock Exchange wants to erect a giant screen outside its HQ in Paternoster Square “to champion company success stories” and “boost sentiment around the stock market”, said Louisa Clarence-Smith in The Times. The hope is that it might help “stem the tide of quoted companies abandoning London to seek higher valuations overseas”. Top marks for trying – but the exchange is up against some formidable opponents, said Lex in the FT. “Watch out London – activists are coming for your listings.” Activist investors are urging more UK firms to follow the likes of gaming group Flutter and shift their primary listings out of London to New York or elsewhere – miners Rio Tinto and Glencore have been lobbied to move to Australia. Lobbying UK companies to move is now “an important part of the activist playbook”, Liad Meidar of Gatemoor Capital Management told Bloomberg. Daniel Loeb's New York hedge fund, Third Point, is in the fray, as is Cevian Capital. The trend may be short-lived, said Lex. “The idea that moves stateside or down under are a panacea for UK-listed companies is fanciful.” Besides, the tide in London is turning at last: the IPO market is showing signs of life this year.

Raspberry Pi: ripple effect

For evidence that the London market is alive and kicking, look no further than the budget computer firm Raspberry Pi, whose shares soared by as much as 40% on Tuesday morning following its City debut, said Alex Daniel in The Independent. As tech listings go, it was comparatively modest: Raspberry Pi was floated with a market capitalisation of £541.6m and will raise around £166m, said City AM. But as Dan Coatsworth of AJ Bell argued, “this IPO is big from a strategic perspective”. It proves the UK “can still compete against the likes of the Nasdaq and attract home-grown champions”. Raspberry Pi is a welcome boon after a barren period. “Whether or not the IPO marks the beginning of a revitalisation for the London stock market remains to be seen,” said Sam North of eToro. “But current sentiment is a vote of confidence in local tech firms.”

Seven days in the Square Mile

After notching up the fastest growth in two years in the first quarter, **Britain's GDP** came in “flat” in April as particularly wet weather put off shoppers and slowed down construction – a blow to PM Rishi Sunak's attempts to revive his election campaign. The one bright spot was spending on services, which grew for the fourth month in a row. **UK unemployment** is also creeping up, rising to 4.4%: its highest rate since September 2021. But average wage growth, at 6%, remains robust with earnings continuing to rise faster than prices. That could influence the timing of the Bank of England's first rate cut.

US inflation fell to 3.3% in May, raising expectations of early interest rate cuts and delivering a boost to President Biden and stock markets, which hit new record highs. Traders now reckon there's an 84% likelihood of a Fed rate cut before the presidential election.

Apple reclaimed its crown as the world's most valuable company from Microsoft as investors welcomed its new push into AI. The EU moved to impose tariffs of up to 50% on Chinese carmakers. French magnate Bernard Arnault appointed his son Frédéric as head of one of the family holding companies controlling luxury group **LVMH**. The Issa brothers, who own **Asda**, announced a parting of the ways: Zuber Issa has sold his stake to the supermarket's private equity backer **TDR**. Alison Rose, the former NatWest boss who was forced to quit following the Nigel Farage Coutts debanking scandal, resurfaced – she has joined the private equity firm **Charterhouse**.

Kiss and tell

Nine months after the departure of CEO Bernard Looney for failing to disclose details of personal relationships with colleagues, BP has updated its code of conduct. “All 90,000 employees must now declare who they're having it away with at work or risk getting fired,” says Alistair Osborne in The Times. Call it “a sort of sack to sack policy for any staffer failing to kiss and tell”. The oil giant's 4,500 senior staff face even more draconian rules relating to “in-house exploration activities” – they have three months to reveal all “intimate work relationships that have occurred over the past three years”. What does BP stand for these days? Try “Bonking Police”.

Issue of the week: trouble in Europe

Political ructions in France and Germany have exposed the fragility of their economies

A decade after the euro crisis threatened the stability of the EU, financial turbulence is once again shaking the bloc – amid big political ructions in France and Germany. “Markets were stunned” by the decision of the French president, Emmanuel Macron, to call a snap election after the far-right won a crushing victory in European parliamentary elections, said John-Paul Ford Rojas on ThisIsMoney. “The euro slumped to a near two-year low against the pound”, and yields on both French and Italian ten-year bonds shot up as investors sold off government debt. Stocks were ditched, too, in a continent-wide rout that reached across the Channel to hit the FTSE 100.



Theodor Weimer: a “beer tent” rant

Germany, which was named by the IMF as “the worst-performing big economy last year”, wasn’t spared the mayhem, said The Economist. Theodor Weimer, boss of the country’s stock exchange, Deutsche Börse, savaged the policies of Olaf Scholz’s coalition government, and warned that Germany was on the path to becoming a “developing country”. It was quite a “rant”, said Guy Chazan and Olaf Storbeck in the FT: “more beer tent than Dax-listed company executive”. Government figures complained that Weimer’s rhetoric evoked that of the far-right Alternative for Germany. A Deutsche Börse spokesman said that Weimer – a man “not known for putting lipstick on the pig”

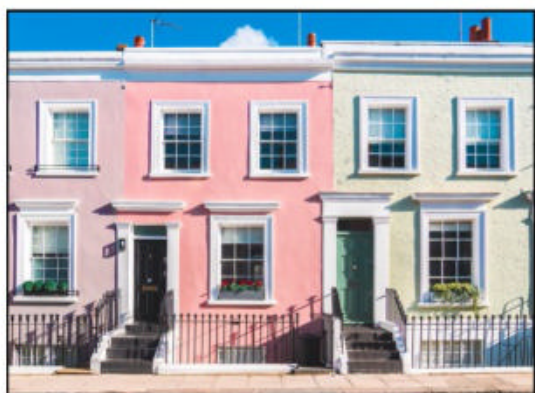
– was just reflecting conversations with international investors. But his populist tirade expresses “growing frustration” among Germany’s business leaders with the coalition’s fumbling efforts to boost the economy and tackle a growing skills shortage, excessive bureaucracy, still-high energy prices and a heavy tax burden. “Germany is descending into chaos,” said Matthew Lynn in The Daily Telegraph. “A decade of catastrophic mistakes is coming back to haunt Europe’s former economic powerhouse.” True, it “still has a huge trade surplus” and “government debt is impressively low” compared with Italy and France. “But that is of little use while a constitutional ‘debt brake’ prevents the government from ramping up investment to help new industries emerge.” And if it sinks, it will “take the rest of the eurozone down with it”.

But, for now, investor anxiety is focused on France, said Marcus Ashworth on Bloomberg. Macron’s snap election is an extremely risky gamble, which adds to fears about France’s debt load and “a sustained deterioration” in its fiscal position. “The log pile was already stacked, but now a match has been thrown on.” The euro debt crisis showed quite “how toxic political uncertainty can be”. Macron may see political advantages in calling a surprise election, “but he’s playing fast and loose with investor confidence”.

Labour’s tax plans: what the experts think

● Pensions cap

Wealthy savers can breathe more freely, said Amy Gibbons in The Daily Telegraph. “Labour has abandoned plans for a tax raid on pensions.” Shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves has dropped a pledge to reinstate the lifetime allowance (LTA) – scrapped by the current Chancellor, Jeremy Hunt – which had capped the amount people could save into a pension, tax free, at £1.073m. Reeves argued in the past that ditching the cap was “a tax cut for the wealthiest”. Clearly, she has changed her tune; the U-turn is estimated to cost a future Labour government £800m a year.



Notting Hill: a capital gains tax hotspot

income tax rates would “reduce the incentive for people to switch income into capital gains” to lower their tax liability. The Lib Dems have also put a £5.2bn CGT increase at the heart of their manifesto. The move wouldn’t affect too many voters. “Less than 3% of UK adults paid

capital gains tax over the decade up to 2020”, according to a recent study – with residents of Notting Hill in London paying more than “Liverpool, Manchester and Newcastle combined”.

● Populist trap?

The chief losers, said The Sunday Times, are likely to be private equity firms, which have made hay from lower CGT rates thanks to a system known as “carried interest” – in which a share of the fund’s overall profits is paid out to investment managers, in lieu of salary, and thus taxed as “a return on investment rather than income”. But entrepreneurs could lose out too. Brent Hoberman of the Founders Forum told the FT that increasing CGT was a “populist trap” that would make Britain “globally uncompetitive”. Sir James Wates, chair of Family Business UK, called the move a “disincentive to growth” – supposedly a Labour Party touchstone.

● CGT speculation

Labour’s promise that it would not raise income tax, national insurance and VAT “has led to increased speculation around another prominent revenue raiser”, said the FT: capital gains tax (CGT). The levy, which raised £16.9bn in 2022/23, is paid on the profit from asset sales: ranging from shares and business assets, to artworks and second homes. The highest rate is currently 28%, “far lower” than the current 45% top rate of income taxes. Arun Advani, a tax expert at the University of Warwick, estimates that “equalising” CGT and

Campaign copycatting

It’s easy to knock politicians in “campaign mode”, said Martha Lane Fox in The Sunday Times. But there are valuable lessons for companies in how political parties market themselves. Here are three things I’ve learnt from watching the campaigns...

They are impressively speedy The pace at which campaigns get going, and keep the momentum, leaves many business projects in the dust. The surprise early election meant ramping up funding support networks, deploying on-the-ground organisers, arranging messaging and media presence – all at short notice. “Having a finite timeline and very clear expectation of the project goal really does help.”

They are masters of communication Whether or not you endorse the sentiments behind “Take Back Control”, “Build Back Better” or “Stop the Boats”, clear, concise messaging works. The same is true for any company raising finance, going public, acquiring something, or rebranding.

They use data better Campaigns spend a lot of time and money on “data science”. They tend to “segment their audience”, enabling “highly targeted and personalised messaging”. They also build in “feedback loops” – obsessively polling “to test narratives, gauge sentiments and course-correct strategies”. The best digital startups are built to react in the same way.

The dangerous allure of the Beijing model

Editorial

The Economist

Twenty years ago, we first heard about the “Beijing consensus”, says *The Economist* – China’s challenge to the Washington consensus “of financial liberalisation, floating currencies and openness to foreign capital”. Beijing, instead, was exporting its own state-led model of development: an export-led economy with close political control of investment and the financial system. It has proved popular in the developing world. “Most similar of all is Vietnam, which has an export- and manufacturing-intensive economy governed by its own Communist Party.” But nations from Turkey to India, Ethiopia to Azerbaijan, have emulated “at least some aspects”. Recently, China’s economy has “stumbled”, with a property crisis and trade “clashes” with Western nations. Meanwhile, most countries that have adopted it have “fallen far short of China-like growth”. But for many developing-world leaders, it offers “reassurance they do not need to become more democratic in order to grow”. For some nations, such as Angola and Tanzania, it’s “less of a blueprint, and more of an excuse”. Despite China’s struggles, “the Beijing consensus is holding firm”.

Ignore the election and cut rates

Alex Brummer

Daily Mail

“The European Central Bank is not known for its boldness,” says Alex Brummer. But after five years of holding its key interest rate at 4%, it has decided that credit conditions are too tight and has delivered a quarter-point cut to 3.75% – putting aside concerns that consumer prices remain sticky, wages keep rising, and service sector costs are high. “Are you watching, Andrew Bailey?” The message from the ECB, and a cadre of other central banks such as Canada, Switzerland and Sweden, is that conditions aren’t perfect, but the cost-of-living crisis is over. And it’s time to act. The Bank of England might argue that a rate cut in the midst of an election campaign “would be seen as giving advantage to the governing Tories”. In fact, it would “underscore Bank independence” if the monetary policy committee makes economics the sole consideration, and votes to cut on 20 June. The Bank needs to get on with the job if it is to follow IMF advice and bring rates down from the present 5.25%, to 3.5% this year. “Monetary machismo” shouldn’t be allowed to obliterate Britain’s recovery.

Labour’s plan for the railways

Alistair Osborne

The Times

Britain’s 30-year “privatisation experiment” on the railways has thrown up “all manner of delights” – at least for everyone but the passengers, says Alistair Osborne. Who can forget how Railtrack crashed into the buffers? Or how its successor, “Network Rail”, racked up £59bn of net debts? Or how the cast of “railway knights”, led by Virgin’s Sir Richard Branson, thrilled us with “tilting” trains and “talking toilets”? After all that colour, Labour is “gearing up for the full monochrome experience” with plans that look remarkably like “a back-to-the-future recreation” of the old British Rail. The shadow transport secretary, Louise Haigh, plans to renationalise all the passenger train companies when their contracts end. Admittedly, that’s not as draconian as it sounds, as “40% of them [are] already in public hands via various operators of last resort”. Haigh reckons her rail fix could save the taxpayer £2.2bn a year. You don’t have to be FirstGroup – the last UK-listed rail and bus group left standing – to question that. Can the public sector really manage the transition? “At least the passengers will know who’s to blame if it can’t.”

Cold turkey after the legal high

Lex

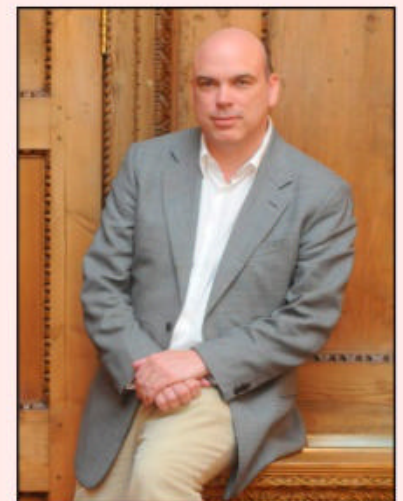
Financial Times

When Canada legalised cannabis for recreational use in 2018, and several US states followed suit, the valuations of “pot companies” exploded as “investors clamoured to join the green rush”, says Lex. “Marijuana was meant to be the next multibillion-dollar industry.” Sadly, as any user will tell you, “highs are often followed by a comedown”. Canada’s biggest player, Canopy Growth – once valued at \$25bn – is now worth just \$800m. Other stocks have typically shed between 60-80% of their value since 2021. “The problem for the cannabis industry is not the lack of demand.” Daily marijuana use in the US is now more common than daily drinking, according to a recent study. The “biggest buzzkill” has instead been “a thriving illicit market” in which illegal producers, untroubled by the need to pay taxes or compliance costs, “flood the market with low-price weed”, and squeeze out legitimate businesses. The only thing that might alter this status quo is “nationwide” US legalisation. Investors shouldn’t hold their breath for it – or hold out too many “high hopes” for a revival.

City profile

Mike Lynch

The verdict, when it finally came, was “stunning”, said the FT. More than 12 years after being accused of what one investigator called “the biggest fraud ever to hit Silicon Valley”, Autonomy’s founder Mike Lynch, 58, was cleared on all 15 counts by a San Francisco jury last week. It was “a moment of pure vindication” for the formerly high-flying British tech entrepreneur – one of the leading figures of the “Silicon Fen” scene around Cambridge in the 1990s. Lynch’s troubles began in 2011, when he sold Autonomy to the US tech giant Hewlett-Packard for \$11bn. A year later, HP’s CEO Meg Whitman accused him and other executives of “falsely inflating” revenues, causing HP to overpay by \$5bn. Had he been convicted, Lynch would have faced 20 years in prison.



“To say that Lynch beat the odds is an understatement,” said Danny Fortson in *The Sunday Times*. “Fewer than one-half of 1% of defendants in federal criminal cases get acquitted.” Moreover, Autonomy’s former finance director, Sushovan Hussain, had already been convicted, and Lynch himself had lost a UK civil fraud case brought by HP. It seems that his gamble of taking the stand paid off. Lynch has always maintained “he was scapegoated for HP’s ineptitude”. In the end, his “folksy testimony” trumped the “prosecutor’s spreadsheets”. Known as “Britain’s Bill Gates” in his heyday, Lynch was controversially extradited to the US in 2022 under a 2003 treaty, originally aimed at combatting terrorism, which critics maintain is “one-sided”, said *The Daily Telegraph*. He now intends to join the fight for reform.

Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Adriatic Metals

The Mail on Sunday
Global demand for silver – used in solar panels, data centres, EVs and phones – is rising, and this junior miner's progress is accelerating as costs fall and profits rise. One for the more adventurous. Buy. 203p.

Associated British Foods

The Times
Supply chain and cost pressures are easing for the owner of Primark and grocery brands including Twinings and Ovaltine. Investing in new Primark stores while ramping up digital capability. Profits are up, and there's a well-covered 2.6% yield. Buy. £25.85.

Carrefour

The Daily Telegraph
After years of “going nowhere”, the French supermarket is set for growth via improved logistics and procurement, more convenience stores, better e-commerce and site redevelopments. Forecast yield 6.4%. A “bargain”. Buy. €14.86.

National Grid

The Times
Shares have been hit by the “sheer scale” of the rights issue needed to fund the grid's £60bn capex plan to meet growing demand. But plans are promising, and the forward yield is 5.6%. Buy. 864p.

Pets at Home Group

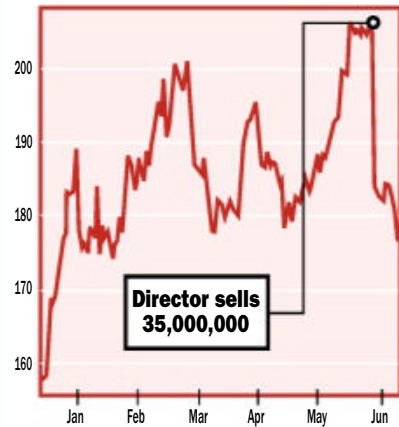
The Sunday Times
Analysts are “drooling” over the vet, grooming and retail empire's new app, which will drive business while collecting data. A new distribution centre should lower costs, and the CMA probe is unlikely to result in “serious injury”. Buy. 308p.

Taylor Wimpey

The Daily Telegraph
A faster-growing economy and lower mortgage rates should bolster demand for the housebuilder, which has strong finances and an 81,000-plot landbank. The outlook is upbeat. Yields 6.3%. Buy. 152.15p.

Directors' dealings

International Workplace Group



The sale of £69m-worth of shares by a company linked to CEO Mark Dixon, to repay a loan, triggered an 11% share fall in the flexible office group. The sale equates to almost 3.5%, but Dixon still owns a quarter of the firm's shares.

SOURCE: INVESTORS' CHRONICLE

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Dr. Martens

Investors' Chronicle
The bootmaker has blamed a weak US wholesale market for a 12% sales fall and tumbling profits (down 43%). With first-half revenues expected to fall, the road to recovery looks “long and exhausting”. Sell. 87.4p.

JD Sports Fashion

Investors' Chronicle
The sports leisurewear retailer's profits are at the low end of expectations. Yet it's increasing its store footprint with 200 new stores, while M&A has raised the prospect of market-share gains in the US. Hold. 120p.

Oakley Capital Investments

The Mail on Sunday
This private equity firm, majoring on tech and healthcare, works with founders to help companies grow. Investments include a Spanish spectacle lens firm, a UK car repair company and a German broadband business. A bargain. Hold. 490p.

Petrofac

Investors' Chronicle
The energy engineering and services firm is running out of time before lenders “come down hard”. Shares rallied after being suspended in May, but liabilities are at a whopping £1.7bn. Sell. 10p.

Unilever

The Times
Unilever owns 400+ brands, including Dove and Hellmann's. It is axing 7,500 jobs to cut costs, and slimming down via a demerger of its capital-intensive ice cream division. Hold. £43.67.

VP

Investors' Chronicle
The equipment rental firm “put on a brave face” amid difficult numbers: a writedown to the value of Brandon Hire Station, bought in 2017, has hit profits. “Tackling issues”, but end-markets – especially housebuilding – are fragile. Hold. 682p.

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip
Keywords Studios
The Times
up 55.96% to £21.36

Worst tip
Renishaw
The Daily Telegraph
down 4.69% to £40.20

Market view

“We believe the market impact will be net positive... the perception of policy paralysis is set to move behind us.”

JPMorgan note on the impact of a Labour election win. Quoted in The Guardian

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	11 June 2024	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	8147.81	8232.04	-1.02%
FTSE All-share UK	4444.07	4496.88	-1.17%
Dow Jones	38642.76	38504.38	0.36%
NASDAQ	17181.18	16761.28	2.51%
Nikkei 225	39134.79	38837.46	0.77%
Hang Seng	18176.34	18444.11	-1.45%
Gold	2304.40	2337.70	-1.42%
Brent Crude Oil	82.07	77.23	6.27%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.62%	3.58%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	4.37	4.27	
US 10-year Treasuries	4.45	4.34	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	2.3% (Apr)	3.2% (Mar)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	3.3% (Apr)	4.3% (Mar)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	1.5% (May)	1.1% (Apr)	
£1 STERLING:	\$1.275	€1.186	¥200.511
			Bitcoin \$66,431.92

Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
Pershing Sq Holdings	4252.00	+3.81
Rolls-Royce Holdings	465.00	+3.79
Ashtead Group	5596.00	+2.49
RS Group	708.50	+1.58
Smith & Nephew	1008.50	+1.34

FALLS

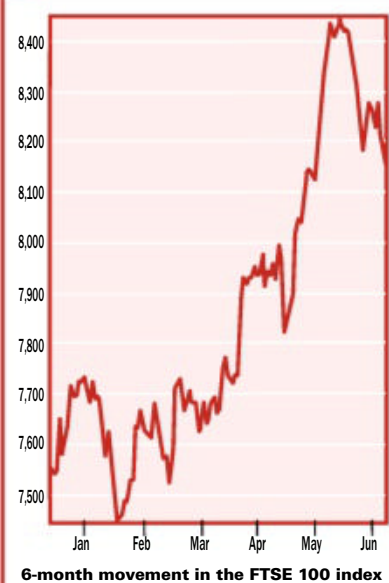
B&M European Val. Ret.	485.00	-11.24
Vodafone Group	70.10	-8.77
Sainsbury J.	257.00	-7.75
WPP	753.00	-7.27
Centrica	132.35	-6.96

FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER


Wood (John)	200.60	+11.30
Energiean	1016.00	-11.60

Source: Refinitiv/FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 11 June (pm)

Following the Footsie



6-month movement in the FTSE 100 index



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Meet the pronatalists, who want to fill the world with babies

Malcolm and Simone Collins are on a mission to make it easier for everyone to have multiple children, and thus avert a looming population crisis. Jenny Kleeman spends a day at their house in Pennsylvania

The Collinses didn't tell me Simone was eight months pregnant when we were making plans for me to spend a Saturday with them at home in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, but I guess it shouldn't have come as a surprise. They are the poster children of the pronatalist movement, on a mission to save humanity by having as many babies as possible.

Malcolm, 37, answers the door of their 18th century farmhouse with four-year-old Octavian George, who is thrilled to have a visitor, bringing toy after toy to show me like an overexcited golden retriever. His little brother, two-year-old Torsten Savage, is on his iPad upstairs. Simone, 36, in an apron that strains across her belly, has her daughter, 16-month-old Titan Invictus, strapped to her back. The imminent arrival of their fourth child, a girl they plan to call Industry Americus Collins, turns out to be only the first in a string of surprises that I encounter during my day with the pronatalists.

Simone and Malcolm work together as what Simone describes as "CEOs and non-profit entrepreneurs": they acquire businesses with investor money that they improve and eventually sell "or turn into a cash cow", ploughing their earnings into their charitable foundation, which encourages people to reproduce. Atheists, they plan on having a minimum of seven children. Their pronatalism is born from the hyper-rational effective altruism movement – most recently made notorious by Sam Bankman-Fried – which uses utilitarian principles and cool-headed logic to determine what is best for life on Earth. This is a numbers game, focused on producing the maximum number of heirs – not to inherit assets, but genes, outlook and world view. And it's being advocated by some of the most successful names in tech, including Elon Musk.

The data, pronatalists fear, points to a looming crisis. After 200 years of overwhelming population growth, birthrates are plummeting. An average of 2.1 babies needs to be born per woman for populations to remain stable; in England and Wales the birthrate is currently 1.49, in the US it is 1.6, in China it's 1.2. In the short-term, the problem is creating a pension time bomb, with not enough young people to support an ageing population. If current trends continue, human civilisation itself may be at risk. "There are going to be countries of old people starving to death," Malcolm says. The only places where the birthrate is not falling to unsustainable levels are countries where the average citizen earns less than \$5,000 (£4,000) a year, he continues. "The only way



Malcolm and Simone with (from left) Torsten, Titan and Octavian

"The Collinses are expecting a girl they plan to name Industry Americus, joining Torsten Savage, Octavian George and Titan Invictus"

countries like ours can survive is through immigration from very poor countries where birthrates continue to be high. You're outsourcing the labour of childrearing to a separate group," he says. "And importing people from Africa to support a mostly non-working white population – because you didn't put in labour to support non-working white people – has really horrible optics."

Simone and Malcolm want to show me that you can raise a family according to entirely rational principles designed to alter the course of human civilisation for the better; that you can make large families work. Every decision the Collinses make is backed by data. "Nominative determinism is a heavily studied field," Malcolm tells me, when I ask about his

children's names. "Girls that have gender-neutral names are more likely to have higher paying careers and get Stem degrees." Names like Titan and Industry are much more than gender neutral, I say. "We wanted to give our kids strong names. We want our kids

to have a strong internal locus of control," he continues, as Octavian waves a plastic rubbish truck in front of my face.

Their home is set apart from the nearest town, down a track

from a main road. When deciding where to live, they weighed metrics on a spreadsheet, ranging from LGBTQ+ rights (which they support) to the density of Nobel laureates produced in a given area to levels of homelessness to major weather events. Then, they looked at cost. They bought this house and the one next door for \$575,000; they allow their neighbours to live in the second house rent free, in exchange for childcare.

Malcolm tells me about Bryan Caplan, author of a treatise against helicopter parenting that argues that upbringing matters less than genetics in childhood development. The Collinses have embraced these ideas. "Pronatalist parenting is intrinsically low-effort parenting," Malcolm says. Both boys have their own iPad fitted with a strap so they can wear them round their neck. Two-year old Torsten is alone somewhere with his. Instead of Christmas, they have Future Day. "The Future Police come and take their toys, and then they have to write a contract about how they're going to make the world a better place, and they get their toys back with some gifts and stuff. They get more gifts when they do whatever they said they were going to do. What does Christmas teach them? Get random toys if you're vaguely good?" Simone brings in a huge basket of laundry, her 16-month-old still strapped to her back. I feel an urge to take Titan from her so she can sit

down, but she bats me away. “Sitting down would drive me nuts,” she says. Malcolm beams at her. “That’s why I want to have kids with this lady.”

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, Simone, who is autistic, never wanted children. She was a “mistake baby”, the child of hippies. “I was always the black sheep in the family. They were very, ‘Go out, experiment.’ And I was like, ‘No, I’m going to stay home and do my homework.’” She met Malcolm as part of a “very systematic campaign” to fall in love and get her heart broken so she could cross that life experience off her list. She wrote a dating profile, went on multiple dates a week, and had a scoring system. Malcolm was doing something very similar, but with a different goal: he was looking for a wife. They dated that summer, and Malcolm eventually proposed.

Malcolm had a turbulent childhood that he clearly doesn’t want to talk about, but he always wanted a large family. Multiple generations of his family had as many as 15 children. He has two siblings; his younger brother, also a pronatalist, is “in a competition” with him to have as many children as possible. He told Simone about his plans on their second date, and she replied that she didn’t want to have kids ever, because she didn’t want to give up on her career. He told her she didn’t have to. “From that point on, the agreement between us was, if we were to ever have kids, I would never have to give up anything I didn’t want to give up. And it turns out I actually like spending time with them. But Malcolm takes the kids to the doctor. Malcolm gets up in the middle of the night when the kids are crying. Malcolm puts the kids to bed at night. Our agreement is, I get infants until they are 18 months old. As soon as the next baby comes, he’s on everyone else. And he literally does everything for them. Men don’t do that.” She gazes at her husband, dreamily. “He’s so unusual.” “Other men would, if we built new cultural standards,” says Malcolm, magnanimously.

Simone is about to have her fourth caesarean (they have to reluctantly leave about 18 months between babies so her uterus can heal). “Eventually, I’m going to go in for surgery and I’m going to start haemorrhaging, and they’re going to take it [her womb] out,” she sighs. If necessary, they will look into surrogacy, but they aren’t keen: it’s expensive and “inegalitarian”, Malcolm says. The Collinses say women’s rights will suffer unless the birthrate improves. “The only cultural groups that survive will be the ones that don’t give women a choice. And that’s a terrifying world for us,” says Malcolm, wide-eyed. “People are like, ‘You’re bringing a *Handmaid’s Tale* into the world!’ – that’s exactly what we’re trying to prevent.” They have “quite a beef with anti-abortion people”, says Malcolm, because restricting abortion is actually bad for birthrates. “Romania tried this. They had a spike in fertility rates and then a quick fall.” Banning abortion gives pregnancy an image problem, he says: it makes everyone assume parents who had children young only did it because they messed up. “It makes being a parent lower class, in the eyes of society. This is a very bad way to motivate high fertility.”

Their brand of pronatalism isn’t about trapping people into having children, Simone says. “Our movement is, if you want to have more kids, or you want to have kids, let’s take away all the stuff that makes it hard.” I had thought the main thing that made it hard was that it’s now so expensive to raise children. “No,” Malcolm says. “Not at all.” Cash handouts and subsidies haven’t worked in South Korea. “The less money somebody has, the more kids they have,” says Malcolm. Surely that’s because the wealthier



Titan: the Collinses favour gender-neutral names

you are, the more likely you are to be in control of your fertility, I say. One of the reasons why I chose to only have two children is because I couldn’t afford to give more kids a good life; the bigger home, the holidays and everything else they would need. A generous smile spreads across Malcolm’s face. “People say this to themselves. But – speaking as someone who has a lot of wealthy friends – people just upgrade their lifestyle as they earn more money. We want to have tons of kids, but as a result of that, we’re not going to be able to send them to private school. We’re not going to be able to pay for them to go to college.” They plan to home-school their children.

“We also don’t raise them like they’re retired millionaires, which is what many Americans do: driving them like private chauffeurs to soccer, to juggling and robotics class. We’re just not going to do that,” says Simone. “When people say, ‘I can’t afford kids,’ what they mean is, ‘I cannot afford to have kids at the standards that I find to be culturally normative,’” Malcolm continues.

We have been talking for hours now. Malcolm offers to take me and the boys out; Simone wants to stay home with Titan. In the car, Malcolm tells me he finds babies “aggravating” and “gross”. In the restaurant, Torsten knocks the table with his foot, causing it to teeter, to almost topple, before it rights itself. Immediately – like a reflex – Malcolm hits him in the face. It is not a heavy blow, but it is a slap with the palm of his hand direct to his two-year-old

son’s face that’s firm enough for me to hear on my voice recorder when I play it back later. Torsten whimpers. “In a restaurant, you gotta be nice,” Malcolm says. “I love you but you gotta be nice in restaurants. No, Toastie.

You’re going to get bopped if you do that.” Smacking is not illegal in Pennsylvania. But the way Malcolm has done it – so casually, so openly, and to such a young child – leaves me speechless.

The meal passes in a bit of a blur. Torsten and Octavian run around the restaurant and, every so often, Malcolm threatens them – “If you go to the door again, Torsten, you’re getting bopped” – before loading new cartoons. For someone dedicated to helping people have as many babies as possible, he doesn’t seem to like children very much. On the way back to the farmhouse, Malcolm tells me that he and Simone have developed a parenting style based on something she observed when she saw tigers in the wild: they react to bad behaviour from their cubs with a paw, a quick negative response in the moment, which they find very effective with their own kids. “I was just giving you the context so you don’t think I’m abusive or something,” he says.

Unlike the Collinses, my thoughts aren’t focused on generations far into the future. I’m thinking only as far as the next one, and how Malcolm’s children are going to feel about his project when they are old enough to realise what they are part of. What does he think they will make of it? “What a failure I would be if my kids hold my exact value system!” he replies. “My kids are going to be like me, but better. They would probably think that I was well-meaning, saw some real issues, probably exaggerated some of the consequences, but that it was necessary in the moment to make the right political changes.” Before I leave them, I ask Simone the same question. “If we are wrong, we want someone to be right,” she says. Then she smiles. “The more kids you have, the more likely you are to have kids that get it right somewhere.”

A longer version of this article appeared in The Observer © 2024 Guardian News and Media Limited

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THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1418

Two Connell Guides and three Week-branded items will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 24 June. Send it to The Week Crossword 1418, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid/listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**



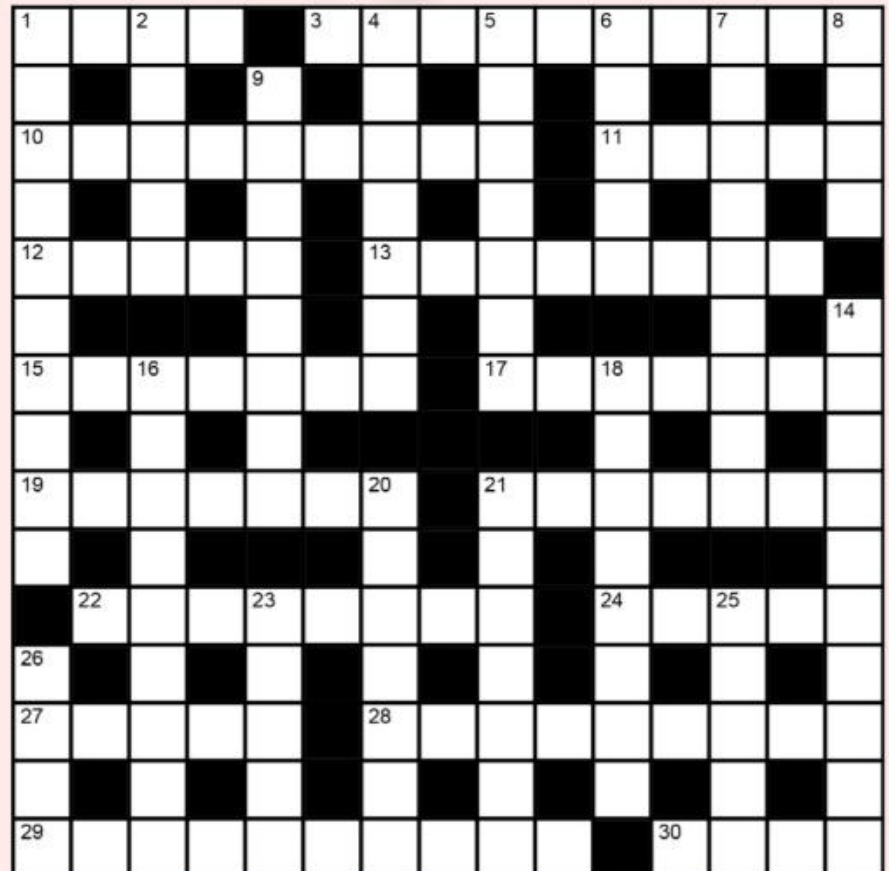
This week's winner will receive Week-branded items including a notebook, coffee mug and tote bag, as well as two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

- 1 Persuade one of eight to include amateur (4)
- 3 Ready to absorb large amount in real business (5,5)
- 10 Friction about arousing sequel in variety show (9)
- 11 Burning mostly behind leg (5)
- 12 Clumsy Italian holds enclosure the wrong way around (5)
- 13 Cheat tax? Leads to endless row (8)
- 15 Beastly wild one in row (7)
- 17 Type of valve designed to deter (7)
- 19 Time feeble editor made a little change (7)
- 21 Fish on line: it could be heavy to lift (3-4)
- 22 Side with refined bats bowled first (8)
- 24 Start university in arrears (5)
- 27 Hunting finally banned, the country set lobby (5)
- 28 Animated miners' leader certainly not black (4-5)
- 29 Season well with herb mentioned (10)
- 30 Rishi perhaps spent lavishly, according to reports (4)

DOWN

- 1 Carriages dash into castle unexpectedly (10)
- 2 Long time holding on to consent (5)
- 4 Make return on holding a lot of shares? (7)
- 5 Pan best to keep soaked when upside-down (7)
- 6 Taser shot may end in this (5)
- 7 Creole cooked arresting turkey dish (9)
- 8 What's put down? Nancy's small number heard (4)
- 9 Hankies shaken to keep temperature cooler (4,4)
- 14 Greetings to Royal Engineers? (5,5)
- 16 Go this to surpass a gambler (3,6)
- 18 Reject act with feathers (4,4)
- 20 Firmly positioned in satellite, speedily put up (4-3)
- 21 Offence against convention in poor class (3,4)
- 23 Textile fabric used in crayoning (5)
- 25 Superb fish (5)
- 26 Reportedly dream residences (4)



Name _____

Address _____

Tel no _____

Clue of the week answer: _____

Clue of the week: Boxer knocking the stuffing out of Teddy boy (5)
Tramp, The Guardian

Solution to Crossword 1416

ACROSS: 1 Push-off 5 Twelfth 9 Trade-name 10 Circa 11 Does in 12 Lovelies 14 Minnesotan 16 Punt 18 Mary 19 Ten wickets 22 Rye bread 23 Mouser 26 Learn 27 Awe-struck 28 Oddment 29 Sleeper

DOWN: 1 Potsdam 2 Soave 3 One-liner 4 Flaw 5 The royal we 6 Exceed 7 Furniture 8 Headset 13 Poles apart 15 Nursemaid 17 Accoutre 18 Morello 20 Striker 21 Orange 24 Slump 25 Less

Clue of the week: Last date's reason for not phoning? (8)

Solution: DEADLINE (dead line)

The winner of 1416 is Stephen Pyke from Shap

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Sudoku 960 (medium)

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 959

3	2	5	1	4	9	7	8	6
1	4	8	2	7	6	5	9	3
7	9	6	8	3	5	4	2	1
9	5	7	6	1	2	3	4	8
8	6	2	3	9	4	1	5	7
4	3	1	7	5	8	2	6	9
5	8	3	4	6	7	9	1	2
2	7	9	5	8	1	6	3	4
6	1	4	9	2	3	8	7	5

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Charity of the week



The Listening Place provides face-to-face, non-judgemental and confidential support to those who feel life is no longer worth living. Highly trained volunteers deliver this support, which continues for as long as the person needs to reduce their suicidal feelings. TLP currently contacts all referrals within 24 hours, with a first appointment within a week. It supports 1,500 people struggling with suicidal feelings at any one time, and aims to support more than 6,000 people in 2024. TLP has robust evidence to show their support works, with visitors reporting a highly significant reduction in suicidal feelings after three and six months of support. **Visit listeningplace.org.uk to find out more.**



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